

The high cost of cheap food

Three major reports in the past two months have pressed the 'panic button' for wildlife threatened by the damaging effects of industrial food production. Environmental organisations warn that global fish populations are reaching the point of no return. Even if urgent action is taken to change fishing methods and enforce fishing control zones, there may be no prospect of the recovery of certain fish such as Atlantic cod, Atlantic salmon and haddock.

Meanwhile, orang-utans, some of our nearest relatives, may become extinct within 12 years. This is due to forest clearances to make way for palm-oil plantations producing vegetable oil for products such as margarine, pastries, biscuits and cosmetics.

The reports were published by the campaign organisations Friends of the Earth, Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, and by the sustainability policy organisation Forum for the Future. They spell out the bleak message: If we do not find ways to control and police our exploitation of natural resources for food, then natural habitats will be destroyed forever, with devastating implications for wildlife, small-scale food producers and our health.

The message may not seem new, but the level of urgency has moved up a grade. These specialist organisations are talking in terms of years rather than decades for the permanent loss of certain natural resources and habitats that provide homes for a diverse range of animals and plants, livelihoods for many of the poorest people on the planet, and valuable food and other resources.

The solutions they propose are sobering. To save orang-utans, there is talk of a total ban on the unsustainable palm oil that appears in one in ten food products on supermarket shelves. To save threatened fish stocks would require coordinated political action on an unprecedented level, with a total ban on certain types of fishing (e.g.

bottom-trawling) and a return to more traditional methods such as line-catching, and establishment of internationally enforced 'no catch' zones.

Yet what will push government and food manufacturers into action? Where is the incentive and policy framework for change? Consumers are barely aware of the links between their food choices and the far-away effects on wildlife and ecosystems. And labels fail to inform them of the negative impact of their choices. In a special three-page report, we examine proposals for legislative and market-based measures to achieving a secure future for marine and forest habitats around the world.

See pages 11-13 for a special report

Food Commission tells FSA: Stick to your guns on salt!

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has signalled that it might weaken its salt reduction targets for processed foods, largely because it has received industry complaints that some targets are 'unachievable'. But new survey information from the Food Commission shows that many major UK supermarkets have already met or beaten the very targets deemed by industry peers to be 'too hard'.

When we visited nine leading supermarkets and examined nine major food categories, we found examples of products that already meet or have beaten the more stringent original salt targets. We call on the FSA to stand firm and not to lose its nerve. Salt reductions are achievable and will benefit everyone's health.

● See page 5 for the survey results



Baby Orangutan. © Orangutan Foundation.

Facing a bleak future: this baby orang-utan is losing her home to palm oil plantations

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Bird 'flu: BSE twenty years on?

It is BSE's 20th anniversary but we seem doomed to repeat history, failing to recognise a crisis in the making. In the summer of 1985 we had the first inkling that Europe would be plunged into its most costly food safety crisis ever when the BBC reported that a vet had seen cases of a new brain disease in Friesian cattle from a farm near Midhurst, West Sussex.

A post mortem report by Carol Richardson, working at the Central Veterinary Laboratories (CVL), and dated 19 September 1985, said that she believed she had found cases of a brain disease similar to scrapie in sheep, but seen for the first time in cattle.

Her bosses sat on the report, and on her statement that seven other cows had probably contracted the disease but had been classified as having 'nervous' symptoms. Only in 1987 did Gerald Wells at the CVL publish a paper giving what he said was the first description of the symptoms and pathology of a case in Kent in October 1987. He made no mention of Richardson's earlier discoveries.

From then on things only got worse as government advisors said there was little or no chance that the disease could be passed to humans, because humans could not get the sheep disease scrapie. The advisors did admit that they could just be wrong, but they gave no advice on what to do to ensure they were right, and no-one at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) wanted to follow that line of research.

It was to be nearly ten years before the government was forced to admit that the disease could jump to humans and that it was incurable. In 1995 the first cases of the new variant form of Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease were diagnosed, but MAFF's slow response to BSE had allowed an estimated 60,000 cattle to become infected, which prompt action could have avoided. Many of those cattle found their way into the human food chain.

So it is with some concern that we find on the European Commission's website a statement on avian 'flu, which states:

'Humans are rarely affected by avian influenza and, if they are, the disease in humans is often mild and transitory. However, human infections with highly pathogenic avian 'flu viruses may be even fatal. Therefore, great attention has always been given to the disease and several actions are constantly taken in the world in order to avoid new AI outbreaks and eradicate as soon as possible any new cases in poultry or other birds.'

This is taken from a website dealing with food and animal welfare. On the pages dealing with public health we are told:

'In fact, over the past years, avian influenza infections in humans have been reported from Southeast Asia on several occasions. All these outbreaks are characterised by high morbidity and mortality in humans...'

The site also notes that *'Experts take the view that an influenza pandemic is inevitable and may be imminent. Animal husbandry systems where humans live in close cohabitation with poultry and pigs are considered the most likely source of new strains capable to cross the species barrier from animal to man, through a mutation mechanism referred to as re-assortment, and cause a pandemic.'*

So tell us please, what exactly has been done to prevent the inevitable and imminent arrival of a deadly pandemic?

And what sort of farming should we be moving to? And when will this happen?

- http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_threats/com/Influenza/influenza_en.htm

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We will not pass your name or email address to any other person or organisation.

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

California takes Burger King to court over acrylamide

The state of California is to prosecute nine major food companies – including Burger King, KFC, Frito-Lay (Pepsico), Heinz, Kettles, Pringles and McDonald's – for failing to warn consumers about the presence of acrylamide in their products.

Acrylamide is created when starchy foods are baked, roasted or fried, and has been identified as a carcinogen for over a decade. California's anti-toxic law, Proposition 65, requires producers to warn consumers about products containing chemicals known to cause cancer or birth defects.

According to pressure group ELF (the Environmental Law Foundation), dozens of products such as fried potatoes and crisps contain excessive levels of acrylamide. For every product the group tested, a one-ounce serving eaten on a daily basis would exceed levels that require a cancer warning label.

California's Attorney General, Bill Lockyer, agreed that Proposition 65 requires consumers to be warned. *'The law benefits us all, and as Attorney general, I have a duty to enforce it.'*

His move will be welcomed by campaigners who have actions already pending. A private case filed in 2002 by the Committee for Education and Research on Toxins named McDonald's and Burger King as defendants, and is pending in the Los Angeles County Superior Court. Several further private suits were filed in August this year by ELF and by Environmental World Watch identifying

many of the same defendants as the Attorney General.

The agency responsible for administering Proposition 65, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard assessment (OEHHA) has accepted that action is required, but intends to put labelling proposals out for consultation and review before issuing regulations. It is currently consulting on a proposal to raise the threshold for the amount of acrylamide that would trigger label warnings by 500 per cent, from the current 0.2 micrograms (ug) per day to 1.0 ug/day.

The OEHHA justifies the new threshold by claiming that the cancer is triggered at levels of acrylamide around 700 ug/kg bodyweight/day although their data tables¹ suggest that for some cancer sites the trigger point is as low as 70 ug/kg bodyweight/day (for tumours of the nervous system), implying that label warning threshold could arguably be lowered rather than raised.

A Food Standards Agency survey of UK dietary intake² concluded that levels of acrylamide in our diets were typically less than 1ug/kg bodyweight/day, although toddlers eating rusks and biscuits may be nearer 2 ug/kg/day. There are no plans to put warnings on UK foods.

- 1) www.oehha.ca.gov/prop65/law/pdf_zip/Acrylamide_NSRL.pdf
- 2) Food Survey Information Sheet 71/05, Food Standards Agency, 11 January 2005

Kraft lobbies for faster cheese

The US food manufacturer Kraft Foods does not appear to have heard of the 'Slow Food Movement' that originated in Italy and promotes the idea of quality food, enjoyed at an appreciative slow pace. If it had, it might question its latest legal move – trying to persuade the US government to shorten the time required to create mature parmesan cheese.

At the end of September, the US Food and Drug Administration received a petition from the giant food firm proposing that the minimum curing time for parmesan, defined in US food standards, be reduced from 10 months to 6 months. Italian producers are required to cure parmesan for a minimum of 12 months.

Kraft is also opposing proposals from the European Commission that would give global legal protection to around 600 food descriptions already protected within the EU. European rules say, for example, that parmesan cheese can only come from Parma; feta cheese from Greece; and Camembert from France. The rules do not apply outside the EU, so parmesan cheese such as the contents of Kraft's plastic tubs can currently be made wherever the company chooses. If the EU rules become globally enforced Kraft would have to source its cheese only from Parma in Italy, or re-name its product 'hard cheese'.



M&S puffs up its oily milk

Marks & Spencer (M&S) does a lot of work to differentiate its products from those of other supermarkets – mainly to associate health qualities with their foods. Their sunflower 'Eat Well' symbol now appears on a very wide range of healthy salads, fruit, vegetables and prepared foods. The sunflower promotes healthy options.

It also appears on this new omega-3 enriched own-brand M&S milk: 'a healthy alternative'. The label is circumspect and says, with due regard to the complexity of the science, that omega-3 fats 'play an important role in maintaining the health of the heart and circulatory system' and are 'a major constituent of the brain and nervous system'.

Not so cautious their PR agency. In true puffery marketing style, we received a press release linking omega-3s (and by implication the omega-3 'super milk') to the 'highly effective' treatment of ADHD, ME, depression and dementia 'as well as playing a role in the

prevention of cardiovascular disease and proper brain and nerve development'. It goes on to recommend the milk for vegetarians who are likely 'to consume more omega-6 fatty acids in proportion to omega-3 than omnivores.'

They rounded off the press release with the warning that *'Recent research all but blames this gross disproportion on the genesis of modern degenerative diseases including arthritis, cancer, heart attack and stroke.'*

Blimey, poor old vegetarians. Wonder if they know they're all on the imminent verge of death. They'd better rush out and buy some premium priced milk to guarantee their immortality.

Within the hour of receiving the press release, we emailed the PR agency to remind them that disease risk reduction claims are illegal. No reply. We wrote to the Advertising Standards Authority to say that the claims deserved censure. *'We don't deal with press releases'* came the response. By then, the claims (or

similar) had been reproduced in *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Scotsman* (and quite probably others), reaching tens of thousands of potential customers for the miracle milk.

The message comes through loud and clear: if you want to make dodgy claims without reprisal, make sure you do it in a press release, then the media will do your marketing for you.



Who defines King Size?

Check out the chocolate bars below. This is King Size – Turkish style. The Turkish Tadelé bar, at the bottom of the pile is labelled as 'King Size'. It was purchased from an ethnic grocer in Walthamstow, east London and weighs only 40g.

In comparison, a Nestlé King Size KitKat Chunky bar is 77g; a Cadbury's King Size dairy milk chocolate bar is 85g; and a Mars Snickers 'Big One' is 100g. Which just goes to show that King Size is a relative concept.

Over the years, sizes of chocolate bars in the highly competitive UK market have increased incrementally, with companies striving constantly to get one up on each other.



As a further illustration of this point, take a look at the two Mars bars pictured (top right). Whilst on a charity fundraising trek in Nepal one of our ever observant researchers purchased a

regular Mars Bar. It is shown next to a regular Mars Bar from the UK.



Needless to say, the UK bar is bigger, by 10g and approximately 45 kcalories. It Nepalis eat such snacks at all (our surveyor reported that they are very expensive in local currency) they seem to be content with fewer kcalories from their so-called 'treats', despite having strenuous lives and living in a cold climate.

This may help to account for the latest figures showing that only 0.5% of Nepali women are obese, compared to 23% of English women and 22.2% of English men (figures for Nepali men are not available).

In the UK we continue to be 'treated' to larger and larger portions of confectionery and more and more kcalories (in the case of a king-size Mars bar, an additional 170 kcalories in comparison to a regular bar). And all the while, our waistlines continue to expand.

Mars encourages customers not to share

We were amused to hear how Masterfoods (Mars) plans to deal with the problem of 'supersizing', to do its bit to help curb over-consumption. The company's plans were reported by the industry's Food & Drink Federation (FDF) in a report showing progress and commitments of food companies to help improve health.

Masterfoods has never denied that chocolate bars have got bigger and bigger. As marketers they know that larger bars give the impression of better value. But the company makes the extraordinary and unproven claim that such bars are not generally eaten by individuals, but usually shared out among friends. To back this up, one of its commitments in the FDF manifesto is: 'We are re-designing our 'king size' confectionery bars into pieces in order to facilitate sharing or consumption on more than one occasion.' So, Masterfoods' answer to obesity is to keep on

super-sizing, but to cut people's food up for them?

We have our doubts. But there is no need for us to express them. Masterfoods has cast the doubt themselves. A national advertising campaign over recent months has focused on the fact that even if Twix (a Masterfoods brand) comes in two sticks, sharing is silly, and gobbling it all yourself is a much better idea.



One poster showed someone breaking away from a motorbike and going off down a separate road in the sidecar, to ensure that they could eat both bars of

Twix on their own. Another variant on the ad campaign has appeared in national magazines (example shown above), emphasising that although the bar has two pieces and is easy to share, it's better not to – leading to the strapline 'Two for me'.

TV guidance for child carers

The World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for stronger guidelines on physical activity for children in nurseries following fears that television watching was being used by carers in place of interactive play and physical activity.

An expert consultation held by the WHO in Japan this summer called for minimum physical activity guidelines be drawn up by authorities in charge of licensing childcare and pre-school facilities. The WHO meeting heard evidence that some young children were watching several hours of television at home before and after their nursery care, and that further TV watching could be used by the staff to keep children pacified.

TV watching is linked to the development of obesity in young children, with evidence that the act of watching is itself obesogenic. In one study¹, children were monitored while at rest and while watching television, and the results showed that their metabolic rate during television viewing was significantly lower (mean decrease of 211 kcal extrapolated to a day) than during rest. Overweight children showed the largest decrease, and it was concluded that television viewing had a profound lowering effect of metabolic rate.

A second study² showed breathing rates tended to be slower and lighter among subjects watching television compared with when they sat reading books.

Other factors linked to TV viewing can also lead to obesity. A recent study³ of TV advertising to children showed that the prevalence of overweight children in a country correlated closely with the number of adverts for sweet or fatty foods being broadcast per hour during children's programmes. The number of adverts for healthier foods was inversely related to overweight prevalence, indicating a specific effect of the type of food being promoted.

1. RC Klesges et al, 1993. *Pediatrics*, 91(2): 281-6.
2. WT Hark et al, 2005, *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol.* 94(2): 247-50.
3. T Lobstein and S Dobb, 2005, *Obesity Reviews*, 6(3): 203-8.



"That's enough TV, it's time for their nap!"

Food Commission tells FSA: Don't lose your nerve!

In 2003, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) quietly issued a spreadsheet containing calculations of how each sector of food manufacturing could help UK adults to achieve the goal of consuming no more than 6g of salt per day. It was a mathematical representation of shared responsibility. It took account of reductions in table salt added by consumers. But it also apportioned salt reductions to every type of processed food. If every sector complied, so the argument went, then most people in the UK would generally eat a less salty diet, even when they choose 'ordinary' foods rather than explicitly 'healthier' options.

Two years on, and the document is still in consultation. We are promised a finalised version within a few months. But the consultation process has already shown up big differences in responses from the food industry. This led the FSA to circulate a new spreadsheet with many relaxed salt levels. A column in the database explained the reason for the change in each case, frequently citing industry as having said the 2003 figures were 'too hard to achieve'. In some cases, just one manufacturer saying they had achieved or beaten the target seemed to give the the FSA courage to stick to its guns.

So we set out to find any examples we could of products that already meet or beat the targets. We looked at nine main food categories in nine of the leading supermarkets.

We found that one or more supermarket had beaten the original salt target in every one of those nine everyday food categories.

We visited branches of ASDA, the Co-op, Iceland, M&S, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Somerfield, Tesco and Waitrose.

For sausages, the FSA's target remained unchanged at 0.55g of sodium per 100g. We found Co-op, M&S and Morrisons sausages all with a lower sodium level of 0.5g. Waitrose and the Co-op had done even better with their healthier versions – at 0.4 and 0.3g respectively.

For white sliced bread, the FSA has suggested a weakened target, allowing 0.4g of sodium instead of 0.35g. We found that Morrisons had already beaten the original target, at 0.28g; Waitrose was close behind at 0.39g.

For baked beans, the FSA has unusually reduced the desired level of sodium below the original 2003 figures, from 3.5 to 3.0g sodium per 100g. We found that ASDA, the Co-op, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Somerfield had all beaten the more stringent target – some achieving a level of as little as 0.2g.

In tomato soup, ASDA and the Co-op had achieved a low 0.2g, beating the new 0.25g figure from the FSA. In cheese and tomato pizzas, ASDA, Iceland, Sainsbury's, Tesco and

Waitrose had all at least met the old 0.3g target and beaten the new 0.4g target, despite the fact that the FSA reported that it had raised the level because *'the industry has indicated that a target of 0.3g would not be achievable'*.

Similar patterns emerged in salt & vinegar crisps and tomato ketchup, with eight out of nine supermarkets already beating the new target, and Waitrose, Iceland and M&S also comfortably beating the previous lower target.

We urge the FSA not to lose their nerve, to liaise with the food technologists who have achieved these changes, and to share learning with the laggards, for the benefit of all.



Supermarket beans, sauces and soups - all beating the FSA salt targets

Peanuts get four reds

So far, Sainsbury's is the only company we've seen who has taken the plunge and give clear nutritional information on the front of the pack, banded in green, orange and red for low, medium and high. The aim is to help people balance their intake of fat, salt, sugar and calories.

Sainsbury's salted peanuts come out with four reds out of five (the only green 'low' is for added sugars). So what are the other companies nervous of? Are Sainsbury's customers running from the peanut packets in fear? Have sales of Sainsbury's peanuts collapsed? All that is required is a small shift from fatty and salty items to healthier alternatives.

We look forward to Sainsbury's sharing sales data. Perhaps that way, other companies can gain the confidence to provide customers with better information.



Burger King snubs FSA on salt

In an apparent snub to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) the fast food giant Burger King said at the beginning of October that it had no further plans to reduce levels of salt, fat or sugar in its products.

Burger King, which uses the slogan *'Have it your way'*, dropped out of the voluntary agreement with the FSA, just 24 hours before the FSA launched the second stage of its £6 million campaign encouraging people to reduce salt.

Yet within hours of receiving a thrashing in the media for appearing to renege on its previous commitment, the company was back with its tail between its legs, saying that it did indeed support the need to take action to reduce salt intake and that its *'commitment to working in partnership with the FSA will continue'*.

The Food Commission and other campaign groups have previously warned that voluntary agreements with the food industry are vulnerable to the whim of a highly competitive marketplace. Many campaigners believe that legislation will be the only way to ensure that all companies face up to their responsibilities as food providers, and

not see progressive companies penalised by losing ground to their competitors.

Rosemary Hignett, FSA head of nutrition, was quoted by the *Sunday Times* as being: *'very disappointed'* by Burger King's initial decision.

The Food Commission has analysed the declared sodium content of Burger King products (excluding desserts and drinks) and has found that the large majority (81 per cent) still contain a lot of salt according to FSA criteria (0.5g sodium or more per 100g). The only exceptions were onion rings (three sizes), some (not all) salads, medium hash browns, a Chicken Bites product and two children's products.

A typical Burger King meal, a Double Whopper & Cheese with large fries gives 5.45g salt – almost the maximum recommended daily intake (6g) for an adult. This intake level has been set to be 'achievable' for the UK population as opposed to 'optimal for health'. Ideally we should consume less salt, but with current intakes typically 11g for men and 8g for women, a compromise figure of 6g per day was felt to be easier to achieve in the short term.

Nutrition advice gets hijacked

The American government has decided to rewrite the food pyramid, turning straightforward health advice into little more than fudge. That's nothing new, argues Kath Dalmeny – the food industry has been doing it for years!

In the UK, the standard representation of the 'balance of good health' is a plate of food. The circular plate is divided up like a pie chart, showing the proportions of different foods that make up a healthy diet, based on good scientific evidence from population studies linking dietary choices to health and disease. About one third of the diet should be carbohydrates; about one third fruit and vegetables. The plate also shows 15% milk and dairy products and 12% meat, fish and alternatives. The remaining sliver is eight per cent left over to allow for a small amount of 'foods containing fat and foods containing sugar'.

In the US, the same advice has taken the form of a pyramid of foods. The proportions of the diet are shown as horizontal layers of the pyramid, the tiny point at the top being the fatty, sugary foods; the other foods being shown as larger and larger components of the diet as they move down the pyramid – starchy carbohydrates being shown as the solid base.

Recently, scientific advisors to the US government suggested that a new foundation layer should be added at the base of the pyramid – physical exercise – a reminder that good health is based on both good food and fitness.

So far so good.

However, this redesign gave the US government the opportunity to turn the pyramid upside down and

shake it, to get rid of some troublesome demons. For a start, the food industry has always insisted that physical exercise is more important than food when it comes to tackling America's most visible health problem – obesity. Simply putting a thin foundation layer of physical exercise into the normal pyramid was not nearly enough. So the whole pyramid has now become a set of stairs up which a stylised figure endlessly climbs.

In an animation to explain the meaning of the pyramid (www.mypyramid.gov), the physical exercise figure literally turns the traditional pyramid on its side and shakes the carefully categorised foods into an unrecognisable heap. And that is where they stay. All equal under the eyes of God, in just the American way.

Each portion of the pyramid has its own bright colour and points skywards in a positive 'just eat more' sort of a way. Graphically, the vertical bars that now divide the pyramid look very similar in size and emphasis; but now there is no hierarchy. The upbeat pro-industry message is: All food is good (as long as you run up and down a pyramid to wear off what you've eaten).

One of the most politically interesting aspects of the new pyramid is that the section entitled 'foods containing fat, foods containing sugar' now refers only to oils. Sugary foods have completely disappeared and only some bland and unhelpful advice remains: 'choose your oils carefully'. Does the lack of sugary products in any of the pyramid sections mean that the government has finally admitted they are not

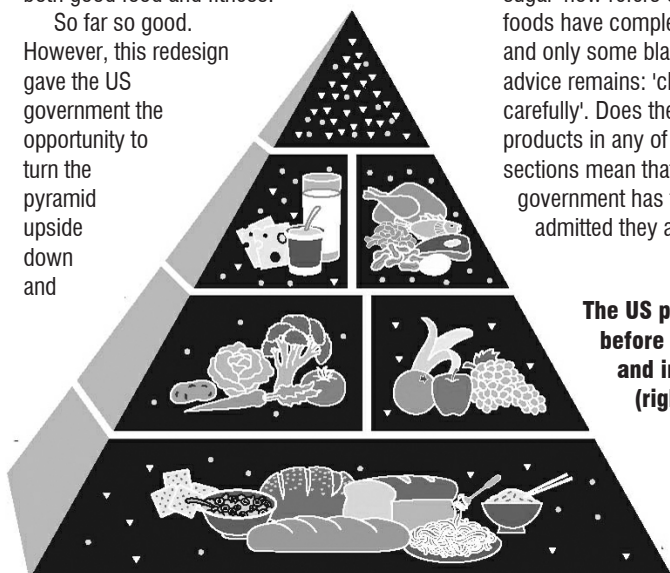
necessary for a healthy diet? Have they been banned, or magically whisked away from under the noses of overweight Americans? Or is it that the government has bowed to pressure from the sugar industry?

Marion Nestle is a professor of nutrition at New York University who served as a nutrition and scientific adviser to the US government when official dietary guidelines were being written in America. Her reports illustrate that drawing up official dietary advice is 'an interplay of give-and-take, bullying, boredom and, eventually, compromise among a group of people who entered the process with differing opinions and agendas'.

At the beginning of 2003 the World Health Organization (WHO) issued the report *Diet, Nutrition & the Prevention of Chronic Diseases*, which also recommended that sugar (excluding natural sugars in milk and fruit) should exceed no more than 10% of the calories in a person's diet. It also classified as 'probable' or 'convincing' the adverse effects of the high intake of sugar-sweetened drinks and heavy marketing of high-calorie foods and fast-food outlets. The US Sugar Association condemned the report as 'unfair', 'misguided' and 'misleading', and lobbied the US Congress to withdraw its annual \$406m funding for the WHO unless the sugar recommendation was scrapped. The Sugar Association and the US National Soft Drinks Association maintained that sugar can safely form one quarter of a person's calorie intake.

And now America's principal tool for dietary education contains no reference to sugar at all.

The US pyramid before (left) and in 2005 (right)



But it couldn't happen here, surely?

It's not just US dietary advice that is prone to being adapted according to the politics and concerns of the day. We took a dip into our archive to show readers some versions of the UK's 'Balance of good health' that have appeared over the years.

A visual representation of the healthy 'balance' of foods is a useful tool for communicating nutritional messages about a whole diet. It avoids complicating the story with discussion of individual nutrients. It also helps nutrition advisors to show people how individual foods can fit into the overall balance.

Pictures have great power to express the importance of certain food groups. The official 'balance of good health' shows the important role of complex carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables, which visually dominate the plate.

However, companies and trade bodies also understand the power of an image. That's why they design their own subtly-altered versions, to shift the emphasis to their own products.

Eat more potatoes!

We receive all sorts of industry information that tries to skew the standard message to show particular food products in a favourable light.

This plate leaflet (below) from the British Potato Council (2005) is a fairly mild example. In the carbohydrates section of the plate (33 per cent) there is not a sign of wholegrain products – one slice of white bread and a pile of cornflakes. The rest is dominated by... guess what? Boiled and mashed potatoes!

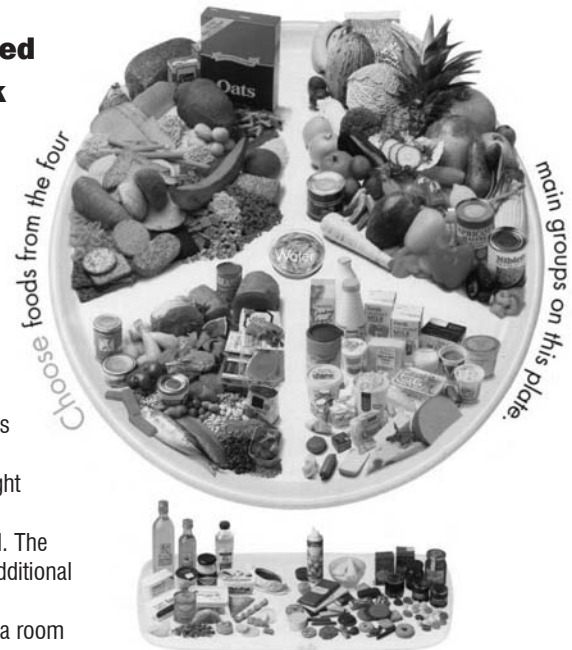


Eat more meat!

We rather enjoyed this image from a 2001 Meat & Livestock Commission leaflet. It is one of the few representations of the 'Balance of good health' that removes the small 8% portion (foods containing fat and foods containing sugar) – placing it right outside the circle.

The foods inside the circle are essential. The foods outside may be tasty, but they are additional and not necessary for a healthy diet.

Of course, that also means there is extra room for the meat and dairy sections conveniently to expand by a few degrees...



The 'meaty' version

Eat more sugar!

A favourite example (this one from further back in our archive – it was first circulated in 1998) shows that the manufacturer thought that 50 per cent of your diet should be carbohydrate – making no distinction between the complex starchy carbohydrates in bread and potatoes

(which we should eat more of) and the simple sugary carbohydrates in confectionery (of which we should eat less).

Funnily enough, this was sent to us by a confectionery company – Mars (now Masterfoods). So much for balance!

The Basics

All foods contain nutrients - but no single food provides them all

The macronutrients contained in food are:

FATS

Fats are essential to life. They are the most concentrated (9 kcal per gramme) source of energy, insulate against the cold and assist in transporting vitamins around the body. A healthy diet must contain some fat.

CARBOHYDRATES

Sugars and starches are a vital source of energy for the body. Energy is measured in kilocalories with carbohydrates providing 4 kcal per gramme. Carbohydrates are found in a wide range of foods including bread, confectionery, fruit, vegetables, rice and pasta.

PROTEIN

Protein is the building material part of our diet. It provides 4 kcal per gramme and is used by the body for the growth and repair of tissues such as skin, muscle, internal organs, hair and nails. Good sources of protein are meat, milk, eggs and fish, with some protein available in beans, nuts and cereals.

As well as macronutrients, foods contain micronutrients in the form of vitamins and minerals. Although these occur only in small amounts in our foods, they are essential to the healthy functioning of the body.

The 'Mars' version

Milk – with extra oestrogen?

Two-thirds of our milk supply comes from pregnant cows, but we don't know what that means for our health. Tim Lobstein continues investigating the impact of modern farming on the quality of the food we buy.

The UK population guzzles milk in nearly the same quantities as our cars guzzle petrol. On average, every household buys about five litres of milk every week. And that is just the domestic scene: more milk is drunk at school, at the fast food restaurant, in canteens and offices, while travelling and even in the hospitality zone of the Food Commission's local bank.

And if you add in the cheese, yogurt, crème fraîche and occasional Ben & Jerry's ice cream, the total comes to the equivalent of 4.4 litres a week for every member of the population, about a pint a day. (Since you ask, the UK's petrol consumption for cars is about 6 litres a week per person).

The figures also show that the UK imports the equivalent of 3 billion litres of milk each year, and exports 2.5 billion litres – quite crazy, but that's another story.

There are many aspects of milk that have concerned consumers and nutritionists over the years, of which the most worrying for health is probably the fatty acid profile, especially the high levels of myristic acid – a saturated fatty acid which is particularly potent at stimulating a rise in LDL blood cholesterol, the form which is a major risk factor in cardiovascular disease.

While attempts have been made to lower the fat content of milk, and while most consumers have been making significant changes to their diets by replacing full-fat milk with reduced-fat versions, other concerns remain. Among these is the problem of hormones.

Nearly two decades ago, the government started allowing trials of bovine somatotropin (BST), a synthetic growth hormone produced using genetic engineering and designed to increase the efficiency with which cattle turned their feed into milk. The hormone worked only too well, with udders full to bursting, putting immense stress on the cow with consequent increases in the incidence of mastitis (infection of the udder) and other ailments such as lameness. The treatment significantly raised the levels of a hormone, insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF1), in the milk, to levels which contributed to the European Union's decision to ban the use of BST for commercial milk production.

The point of this story is that it opened up a new area of concern for consumers, namely the hormone content of milk supplies. And yet, surprisingly, very little research has been published on the topic. And, even more to the point, there is even less information about how changes in modern farming practices may influence the quantities and types of hormones found in milk.

What we do know

The average lifespan of modern dairy cows is only about five years. In normal circumstances they can live to an age of 25-30 years, but physiological stress and a farmer's sharp eye for a cow whose yield is declining, means that the animals are turned into meat and bone meal in just a few years – equivalent to a teenager in human terms.

Modern dairy farmers hope their cows will to produce over 6,000 litres of milk during their annual 10 month lactation, with some prize cows producing 12,000 litres, equivalent to more than 40 litres (70 pints) a day during peak production. The graph (opposite) shows the average for the UK, which has risen from 16 pints per day to 39 pints per day in just a few cattle-generations.

A dairy cow raised by industrial farming methods is expected to give birth to a calf at least every 12 months, to keep her producing milk. A pregnancy is nine months, so cows are simultaneously lactating and pregnant for a

How milk hormones affect health?

Milk may contain varying amounts of many hormonal substances, with an unknown effect on our own endocrine systems. When pregnant, a cow's hormone levels may rise, but 70% of our milk comes from pregnant cows. This may rise to 80% or even 90% using new farming methods.

Yet the research evidence, which is very sparse, points to several possible influences on our normal endocrine functions and on childhood growth and development. These are summarised in the box, but it cannot be stressed too highly that the research base is extremely poor, and we should be seeking better evidence.

Milk may contain...

Progesterone

Oestrogen

Cortisone
and other adrenal steroids

IGF-1 growth hormone

Leptin

Oxytocin

Prolactin

Thyroxine
and triiodothyronine

Which may be linked to...

Prostate cancer

Colon cancer

Endometrial cancer
Breast cancer

Diabetes

Obesity

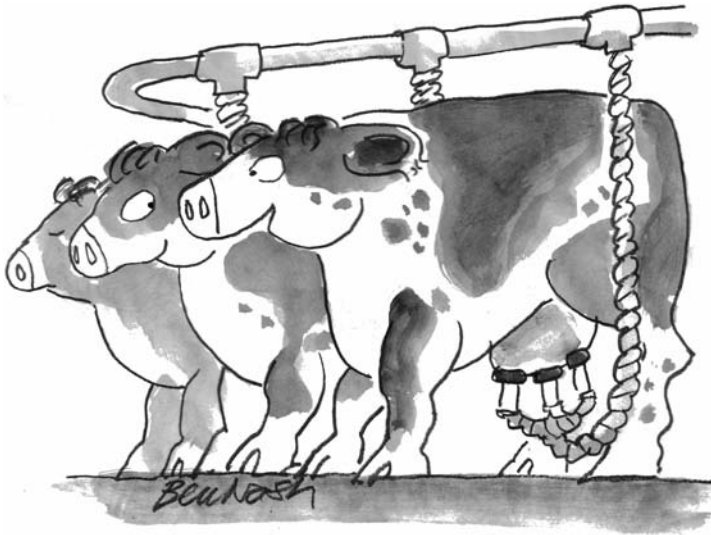
Cardiovascular disease

Allergies

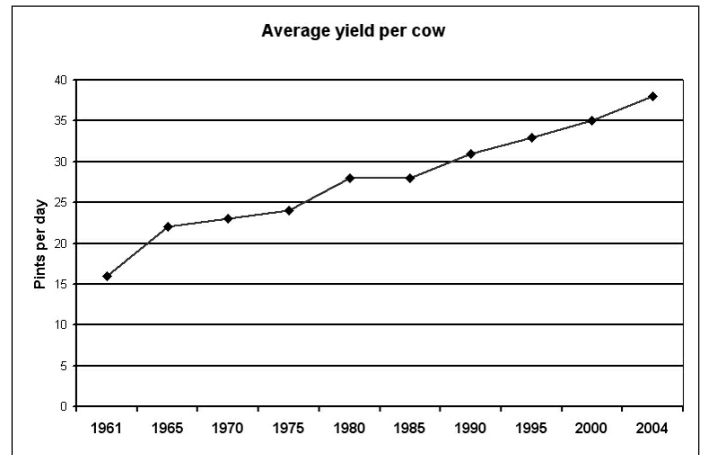
Acne
and pubertal development

Source: PubMed searches (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>)

farming



“This milk’ll have them all getting broody!”



significant part of the cycle. After calving the cow is ‘open’ and available for a new conception, which will usually take place within three months (a cow’s menstrual cycle is 21 days).

About two months before she gives birth, the milking is stopped and she is ‘dried off’. Within days of giving birth the milking routine starts again. Within three months of giving birth, the cow is made pregnant again. As the diagram of the cow’s year shows (below), the cow is pregnant for about seven out of ten months of lactation, from which we can deduce that at least two thirds of our milk is extracted from pregnant cows.

The cow’s year



In order to maximise yields still further, a farmer may be tempted to shorten the open period and the drying off period, so that there are fewer months when the cow is not lactating. The effect of this would be to increase the proportion of time that the milk is being collected while the cow is pregnant.

Taking milk while a cow is pregnant, and especially during the last few weeks of her pregnancy, raises questions about hormones in milk.

During pregnancy, the cow’s ovaries secrete high levels of progesterone. Her placenta secretes high levels of oestrogen. These hormones, plus others, including corticosteroids, growth hormones and prolactin, target the mammary gland to stimulate lactation.

The figure below shows the hormone cycles in cattle during a menstrual cycle (around 21 days) followed by pregnancy and calving. The curves show blood levels of these hormones, but milk can be expected to follow the pattern. Indeed, one of the tests for whether a cow is

pregnant is to examine the progesterone levels in milk. The answer is ‘yes’ if the progesterone exceeds 10 microgram per litre of milk¹, which is typically higher than the blood levels.

New techniques are being explored to reduce the ‘dry’ period before she gives birth. There are moves towards using a one-month dry period,² and researchers are now demonstrating that a zero dry period is possible.³ Yet these last few weeks of pregnancy are when circulating hormones can rise to their highest levels.

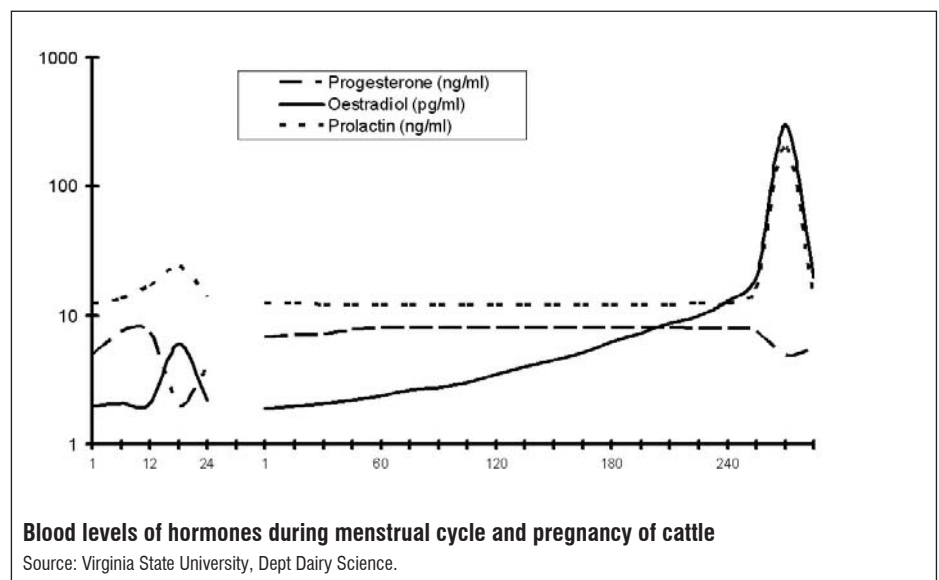
The quantities of hormones in our milk supply are not equivalent to pharmaceutical amounts, and their absorption from the alimentary tract may be poor. But there is a surprising lack of evidence about the possible effects on our health of consuming cattle hormones in small quantities, every day for decades. All we know is that a string of research papers has highlighted various concerns that appear to be linked to milk and dairy food consumption (see box).

Infants will be especially vulnerable, partly because they drink a lot of milk, partly because they are still growing and may be more vulnerable to hormonal interference, and partly because, in the first few months especially, their

gut walls are more permeable to larger molecules such as hormones.

Milk is a food that is rapidly expanding its market base as diets in the Eastern and Southern hemispheres become increasingly westernised. Its production has become intensified and its hormone content increased, yet we know next to nothing about its potential impact on health. And we haven’t even started to look at the other components of milk, such as its enzymes, antibodies or nucleotides.

- 1) P Rioux, D Rajotte. Progesterone in milk: a simple experiment illustrating estrous cycle and enzyme immunoassay. *Adv Physiol Educ* 2004, 28:64-67.
- 2) KC Bachman. Milk production of dairy cows treated with oestrogen at the onset of a short dry period. *J Dairy Sci* 2002, 85:797-803.
- 3) Washington State University: *Dry Period – Does the Cow Need One?* See <http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/dairy/shortcourse/shortcourseArticles.asp>



Healthy eating advice

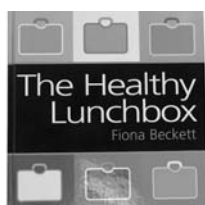
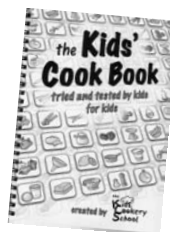
Talking about Food: *How to give effective healthy eating advice to disadvantaged pregnant women*, is a practical guide for health professionals from Jenny McLeish of the Maternity Alliance. It sets out clearly the issues to be considered, steps for effective nutritional counselling, and the tools and materials needed to help disadvantaged women achieve the best for their babies. It costs £5 and can be ordered from:

publications@maternityalliance.org.uk or call: 020 7490 7639, ext. 353.

The Kids' Cook Book: *Tried and tested by kids* is a practical cookbook for children and their families, based on sound experience of what works at the pioneering Kids' Cookery School (www.thekidscookeryschool.co.uk) in

West London. The instructions are based on icons rather than relying too much on text, and present nice achievable recipes to help kids get the hang of cookery techniques. A useful teaching and learning tool, ring bound so it lies flat on the worktop. It costs £4.99. Call: 020 8992 8882.

The Healthy Lunchbox is a friendly, inspiring and colourful book to help people treat their children's lunchboxes with a bit of imagination, using real ingredients rather than relying on processed ready-made components. Nice touches are characterful menus designed to appeal to boys and girls, and options designed for children who 'don't want to be different'. It costs £8.99, published by Grub Street, call: 020 7738 1008.



Badvert

Tongues put through the mill

Are these the saltiest salt and vinegar crisps you've ever seen? They may well be – they're certainly the saltiest we've ever seen. The label declares they contain an astonishing 2.6g of sodium per 100g – that's 6.5 per cent salt. Each bag contains 2.5g of salt – half the recommended maximum daily intake for adult women. No wonder the manufacturer's strapline is 'Put your tongue through the Red Mill'.



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Invisible damage

Everyday food products are implicated in the destruction of forests and sea-life, with untold consequences for wildlife, millions of livelihoods and our health. What can be done to reverse the destruction?

Human beings have a tough choice to make. If we continue eating the same food that we do now, then it is pretty much certain that within the next few years we will see the destruction of marine and forest habitats that support fish and apes, resulting in the extinction of many familiar species.

Beyond the pure conservation concerns that this raises, these same natural habitats also provide a living for millions of people – some of them from the poorest communities on earth. The Food & Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) estimates that the fishing industry alone supports 200 million livelihoods worldwide.

Increasing evidence linking marine oils to brain development and heart health should also give us pause for thought. What happens when we destroy one of the richest sources of omega-3 oils – marine fish?

The links between the food we buy on the supermarket shelves and the destruction of ecosystems is obscure to all but the most inquisitive of shoppers. Some positive eco-labelling does now exist to assure consumers that their purchases are more sustainable. However, the majority of products bought by most people on an everyday basis contain ingredients that are unsustainable. Their continued sale will ultimately result in the destruction of both unsustainable and sustainable resources.

Who would have guessed, for example, that buying a tub of margarine in a UK supermarket can contribute to the alarming

decline of orang-utan populations? Who would believe that buying products containing palm oil implicates the buyer in a trail of destruction that leads right back to Sumatran forests? Yet this is the very finding of a report from Friends of the Earth entitled *The Oil for Apes Scandal*, published in September.

Ninety per cent of the world's palm-oil exports come from plantations in Malaysia and Indonesia – mainly the islands of Borneo and Sumatra. Forests are being cleared to make way for palm plantations to provide ingredients for lucrative overseas markets. The very lowland forest that the oil-palm industry favours for conversion is the only remaining habitat of the orang-utan.

The UK is the second biggest European importer of palm oil (after Holland). Palm oil imports into the UK doubled between 1995 and 2004 to 914,000 tonnes, representing nearly a quarter of total EU palm-oil imports. Much of this is destined for food production, with Friends of the Earth estimating that as many as one in ten supermarket products contain palm oil.

More than 100 UK companies either import, invest in, or buy palm oil. These include several major food companies whose products are ubiquitous: Allied Bakeries, Northern Foods, Rank Hovis McDougal (RHM), Warburtons, Cadbury Schweppes and Nestlé – to name but a few. But the use of palm oil reaches further than just a few proprietary food brands. Companies such as Northern Foods supply many of the leading supermarkets with both branded and own-brand products, including biscuits, cakes, puddings, pastries, savoury products and pizzas.

The name 'palm oil' may or may not appear in the ingredients list. It is often described under the generic term 'vegetable oil', so it is very hard for a consumer to opt out of the chain of destruction. Currently, manufacturers are not obliged to say what kind of vegetable oil they use, nor do many of them trace the source of their palm oil. And we have found not a single product that names the origin of its palm oil ingredients, or assures consumers that the oil comes from non-destructive sources.



The clearance of Malaysian and Indonesian forests to make way for palm-oil plantations (left) contributes to the decline of orang-utan populations. Tesco is just one of the supermarkets to stock a wide range of foods containing palm oil (above); the ingredient is everywhere. Who would have guessed that such everyday products as white bread, chocolate spread, tortilla chips, sunflower spread and mushroom quiche could be causing the demise of orang-utans?

Sea fish and orang-utans

Consumers have little incentive or information to avoid foods whose production destroys wildlife and habitats. Kath Dalmeny asks: how can sustainable choices ever become the norm?

Strategies to promote products from environmentally friendly sources often focus on using a logo to signal which products are a better choice. However, even if consumers were to be presented with information about the effects of their purchases on orang-utan populations or fish stocks, would this be enough to persuade most people to shift to more sustainable products? Can a logo communicate complicated issues? And even if enough consumers were persuaded to shift their choices voluntarily, would they do so with the

kind of speed that is now required? They would have to do so permanently – never again to make unsustainable purchases.

Most organisations concerned with the ethics of food production agree that the main impetus for a shift to more sustainable products is unlikely to come from consumers. Connections between foods and their environmental effects are just too complicated, and anyway invisible at the point of purchase. Unsustainable products are currently priced and described as if they are a positive choice – no warning labels link

products to the destruction of forests and sea-life. The alternatives are poorly understood or promoted, and most people do not link custard creams or cod steaks to distant forests and underwater habitats.

Seeking a secure future for forests and marine life, and protection for the livelihoods of forest peoples and small fishing communities, campaigners now point firmly to the need for total bans on the most unsustainable products and industrial forestry/fishing practices. They also call urgently for the establishment of protected marine and forest reserves to ensure that large enough numbers of plants and animals survive to ensure breeding populations and sufficient diversity for a healthy ecosystem.

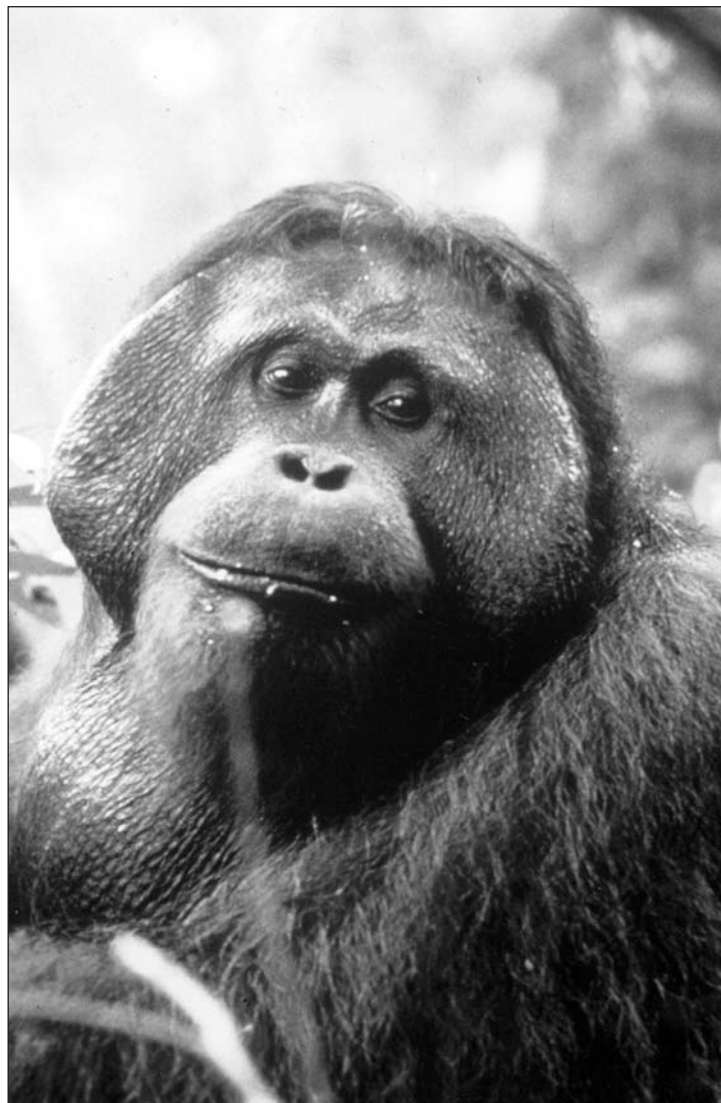
Such policies would require international agreements and policing of reserves on an unprecedented scale, supported by enormous political and financial commitment. They would also need to provide opportunities for local people to make a living in a way that is permanently in keeping with the goals of habitat and wildlife conservation.

There is also a growing understanding among campaign organisations that such goals can only be achieved by systems that generate added value for conservation-friendly products, and which can verify sustainability throughout the ever-more-complex supply chain of a globalised market.

Certification schemes offer an approach that could provide financial backing for orang-utan friendly palm oil and fish-friendly fishing techniques. They are more than just a logo to convince consumers to buy a product. They are just as significant for the manufacturers and retailers themselves – a way of making sustainability a requirement throughout complex supply chains.

The Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) and Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) are widely respected certification systems associated with food and household products. The rules are governed by not-for-profit organisations that work to match human needs with the capacity of natural systems to produce materials and food ingredients. Crucially, they are open to scrutiny and are continually developing – there is no place here for shallow and temporary ‘assurance schemes’ that do little more than rubber-stamp weak rules for environmental protection.

There is also a growing understanding that market-based solutions are needed to create a reliable income for people – especially those in poor countries – whose livelihoods depend on natural wealth found in the oceans and forests. Certifying bodies now recognise that if they



With 80% of their habitat lost in the last 20 years, only a few thousand orang-utans survive.

are a call to action!



The Marine Stewardship Council logo is one of the few ways consumers can identify sea fish that come from verified sustainable sources

engage forest-dwellers and fishing communities in the process of conservation, especially by offering them reliable incomes and preferential fishing and farming rights based on conservation management plans, then they themselves will be partners in the defence of natural resources on which their livelihoods depend. But trust must be built: communities must understand the value of the natural resources they rely on, and receive commensurate reward for protecting them on all our behalves. Oceans may then remain rich and permanent sources of human food.

is banned. As leading US oceanographer Sylvia Earle explains, 'Trawling is like bulldozing a forest to catch songbirds' – it is an industrialised fishing technique that cuts gargantuan swathes through underwater landscapes, with nets big enough to contain several jumbo jets. If ecosystem destruction at this scale were visible above the waves, it would be an international scandal. M&S therefore favours less intensive line-caught cod. Meanwhile, Sainsbury's is the only supermarket to have set a goal of 100 per cent MSC-certified fish, by 2010.

Three mainstream UK supermarkets are so far credited as leading the way on providing fish from more sustainable and certified supplies. Marks & Spencer, Waitrose and Sainsbury's are widely recognised as taking a pro-active approach to sustainable fisheries, setting the pace in a competitive sector.

Waitrose, for example, sources Icelandic fish, where bottom-trawling

However, where does this leave the other supermarkets? Is it enough simply to accept ethical fish-buying standards from just a few retailers whilst others continue to encourage the rest of us to eat our way through dwindling fish stocks? What good will that be to future generations?

The way forward for palm-oil production is less clear. Supermarkets have only just begun to wake up to the ramifications of removing this ingredient from so many products, or of replacing it with a sustainable alternative. Environmental organisations such as the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Friends of the Earth urge companies to engage with the international Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil – a meeting place for all those concerned about wildlife, livelihoods of people in poor countries, and the manufacture of food and other products.

Supermarkets need to set targets for phasing out unsustainable palm oil, communicate this to their suppliers, and invest in alternative sources. They cannot wait for consumers to wake up to the destruction of whole ecosystems.

● The new environmental reports referred to in this feature are: *Fishing for good* (www.forumforthefuture.org.uk); *Like shooting fish in a barrel* (www.sustainweb.org) and *The oil for apes scandal* (www.foe.co.uk).

Sainsbury's offers to *triple* your food miles!

As our food system becomes ever more global, the products we consume represent the use of more and more transport fuel. The food system has been identified as a major contribution to carbon dioxide emissions and global warming.

There are plenty of examples of the lunacy of increasing food miles, such as apples brought all the way from New Zealand during our own apple season, whilst orchards in the UK are routinely grubbed up as 'uneconomic' – a waste of both fuel and good apple trees.

The globalised food system has meant that we look further and further afield for our gastronomic experiences. Wine is a good example. Although lots of fine wine can be bought from Europe, the UK has become by far the biggest export market for Australian wine. Australian exports of wine to the UK have gone up nearly threefold in the past 10 years, to over £400 million per year, according to figures published in September by the Australian Wine & Brandy Corporation.



We don't have to stop drinking wine altogether to cut our personal contribution to global warming, but we could make sure that most of the wine we drink comes from closer to home. European producers have many admirable wines. Supermarkets, who are well aware of the link between food choices and carbon dioxide emissions, could help us to choose less carbon-intensive products. They could make a commitment to putting special offers only on

products grown and packed within a reasonable distance, and to discourage use of aeroplanes for food and passengers.

In light of this, what do we find in Sainsbury's? Shelf after shelf of Australian wine – but also a special promotion. Collect Nectar Points on Australian wine, then set off on a return flight to Australia to see where the wine was grown – effectively *tripling* your food miles!

Alco-milk shakes?

Milk is for kids. Grown-ups drink alcohol. Yes?

The drinks industry got into some trouble when they stated selling alco-pops with marketing messages designed to appeal to under-age drinkers.

Now we could see the same battle being fought again over alcoholic milk drinks.

This new means of making alcohol palatable to younger markets has been tried in Australia, where Wicked Holdings Pty Ltd – a company specifically formed to market alcoholic drinks – applied for a license to distribute a beverage it was branding 'Moo Joose'.

The product was well-designed: it consisted of skimmed milk with 5.3% added alcohol, sold in small 'alcopop' type bottles, in standard milkshake flavours: chocolate, strawberry (Strawberry Rush), banana (Banana Smash) and coffee.

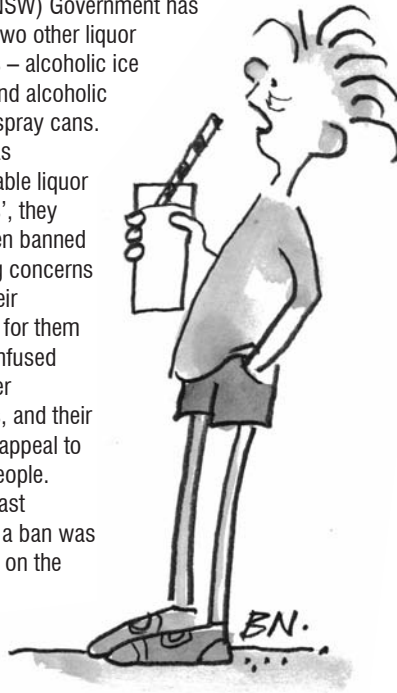
The company claimed it would be targeting women aged 18-25 by emphasising the fresh and healthy image of milk and the product's low level of fat. Rumours were spread encouraging the belief that the milk content reduced drunkenness by providing a protective lining to the stomach.

There followed a major public health battle, with anti-alcohol campaigners claiming the product was designed to appeal to adolescents and even younger children. The dairy industry feared it would threaten the brand image of milk. Finally, after lengthy appeals and tribunals, the product was refused a distribution licence.

But the story may not have ended. Not only has the idea of a milk-alcohol drink still to be tried outside of Australia, but other more exotic designs are being dreamt up to increase consumption of alcohol.

In recent years the New South Wales (NSW) Government has banned two other liquor products – alcoholic ice blocks and alcoholic aerosol spray cans. Known as 'undesirable liquor products', they have been banned following concerns about their potential for them to be confused with other products, and their obvious appeal to young people.

And last summer a ban was imposed on the sale of



"But it's just the hair of the dog, Mum!!"

alcoholic vapour in NSW. The action followed concerns about alcoholic vapour produced by the Alcohol Without Liquid (AWOL) device.

Again, there were concerns that the device has a special appeal to minors because of its gimmicky nature and novelty value. AWOL, a vapourizer manufactured in the UK, has been labelled the 'ultimate party toy' in its promotion as a new way of consuming alcohol. The device mixes a spirit – like vodka – with oxygen, producing an alcoholic mist that is inhaled through an oxygen mask. Promoters have claimed consumers can get drunk ten times faster, that there is no hangover, and that it will be used in clubs and bars in the UK to provide 'partygoers and hedonists with a radical new way to consume alcohol'.

Celebrity chefs back Children's Food Bill

An open letter from more than 20 prominent food writers and chefs has called on the Prime Minister to support the Children's Food Bill to protect children from being targeted by junk food advertisers. Famous names such as Raymond Blanc, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Sophie Grigson, Nigel Slater, Rick Stein and Antony Worrall Thompson have all called upon the Government to end advertising to children that presents junk foods and drinks as positive and desirable choices.

• More information at www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodbill/info.asp

Badvert

Alien food for children

Here's a riddle: I am quick and easy, yet not fast food. I am small in size 'yet big in opportunity'? I am 'filled in outer space by space-bakers' on an 'intergalactic cheese planet'.

I look like a bread roll filled with cheese spread and no tomato, onion, pickle or salad. I am wrapped in blue plastic. What on earth am I?

The answer is: Riddlers and they're new from Warburtons. We assume they're aimed at the kids' lunchbox market due to the space alien imagery. But the question remains: what (indeed) am I? Is this really meant to be lunch??!



Badvert

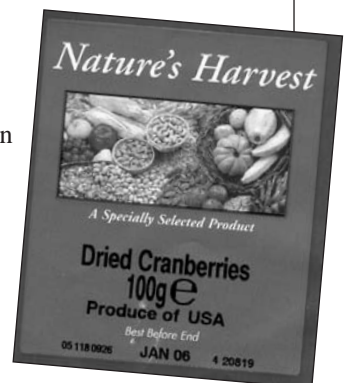
Seriously sugary health food

Dried cranberries? Surely that's a healthy snack. And from a 'health food' shop, too.

But wait a moment. What's this ingredients list telling me: sugar first then dried cranberries...?

That's more than half added sugar. Less than half the pack is real cranberry.

These packs cost £1.19 for 100g. If the pack is half sugar (typically 75p per kilo) then the cranberries are being priced at over £27.00 per kilo! I want my money back!



Nestlé's unfair trade

How the Nestlé executives must be laughing in their Swiss headquarters as the world of ethical consumerism ties itself in knots.

The highly respected Fairtrade Foundation has a logo which it allows on products supplied by farmers paid a half-decent wage. Nestlé has launched a brand of coffee – Partners Blend – which, the company says, conforms to the fair trade principles, and the Foundation has duly allowed the logo onto the Partners Blend label.



This has infuriated a sizable section of the ethical consumer community who

believe that Nestlé's treatment of its third world workers is a scandal and that 99% of the company's coffee will still be *unfairly traded* – indeed, as one of the big three world coffee producers, Nestlé could be blamed for causing much of the unfair trade which the Fairtrade Foundation is trying to combat.

The Foundation claims that its hands are tied, as it is required to judge the ethical trading compliance of a product, not a company. But a survey of Nestlé boycott supporters (who boycott Nestlé for its continued flouting of the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes) indicates that many ethical consumers believe the Fairtrade logo endorses Nestlé the company, not just Partners Blend.

For the record...

This year alone Nestlé has been highlighted for its terrible record on workers' rights. In July, a leading US human rights organisation (the International Labour Rights Fund) filed a lawsuit against Nestlé and two other companies for 'trafficking, torture and forced labour' of children who cultivate and harvest cocoa beans that the companies import from Africa.

In Colombia, there have been repeated murder threats made by paramilitary organisations targeting Nestlé workers who have been trying to form a union. After a long and violent conflict Nestlé finally succeeded in destroying the trade union section in the milk powder factory Cicolac.

And this September, in the Philippines, a trade union leader at the largest Nestlé plant in the country was murdered. Unidentified gunmen shot Diosdado Fortuna as he left the factory where he had been campaigning for two years for collective bargaining and pension rights.



"D'you think we're being unfair?"

GM animal feed

The GM Freeze campaign and a coalition of campaign organisations has met with supermarkets and producers to discuss the possibilities of their removing all GM animal feed from their supply chains.

The biggest market for GM products in Europe remains animal feed, mainly soya meal imported from the US and Latin America. Any increase in the planting of GM soya for animal feed would start to have an impact on the availability of non-GM soya derivatives in human food such as lecithin in chocolate and biscuits, which are by-products of the animal feed industry.

The GM Freeze reports that whilst the relatively small Marks & Spencer has done the most and removed GM animal feed from much of its fresh animal produce (including milk, meat, fish and eggs), most of the others have gone only partially down this route. Indeed Tesco and Sainsbury's are now telling their customers that the reason they have not gone further in their non-GM policy is to help hard-pressed farmers:

'The farming community have told us that to extend the range of meat we sell from animals fed on non-GM would put immense pressure on them' came Tesco's reply to customer letter, received in July 2005.

So what would it cost supermarkets to go GM-free? Non-GM animal feed in the UK was only fetching around £5 per tonne premium last year. This is because soya and maize only make up a fraction of the ration of a dairy cow and other factors, such as labour, are far more significant in the total costs of production. This would mean an approximate 0.15 pence per litre

increase if cows were fed a GM-free diet. Hard pressed dairy farmers may struggle to absorb such a cost but the highly profitable retail sector should surely be able to cope with it.

Last year, Tesco sold 17% of the UK's liquid milk sales or 1.1 billion litres per year – 30% of supermarket sales.* A 0.15p per litre increase would cost the company approximately £1.65m. Sounds a lot but in the great scheme of things it amounts to only 0.08% of the pre-tax profit announced this year by Tesco (£2,029m). So by paying a small premium for non-GM milk, Tesco would protect farmers from further pressure, meet customer demands and the company could bask in the glory of a job well done.

It won't escape the notice of farmers that the Chief Executive Officer of Tesco, Sir Terry Leahy, could cover the premium of non-GM milk out of the £3.19 million salary package he received last year, and still leave plenty to spare!

* Figures from the Milk Development Council and Taylor-Nelson Sofres (TNS)

Legal, decent, honest and true?

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

X Dairy calcium not 'essential'
The Vegan Society objected to an article on the AOL website. The article was paid for by Nestlé and therefore classified as an advertisement since the content was not under independent editorial control.

The article was aimed at women and called *'Mastering your metabolism part 3: Eat well, feel great'*. In the article, dairy products were described as *'Essential for healthy bones'*.

The complainants objected that the advert was misleading because it is not necessary to eat dairy products to have healthy bones, and that calcium can be consumed in other foods.

Nestlé said it had used the term 'essential' to highlight the importance of dairy products' contribution to calcium intake and healthy bones. However, the ASA said that it thought use of the word 'essential' implied dairy products were the only source of calcium. Because that was not correct, it concluded that the advertorial was likely to mislead and advised Nestlé to seek assistance from the Committee on Advertising Practice (CAP) copy advice team before using a similar campaign.

X Shreddies 'science'
A TV ad for Nestlé Shreddies breakfast cereal showed children apparently taking part in a scientific experiment – some of them having Shreddies in the morning. Their teacher, Mrs. Kelly, was pictured saying *'You can tell when they've had a good breakfast; they're engaged, they're enthusiastic'*. The advert showed a graphic saying 'School Fuel' (which also appears on boxes of Shreddies). Whilst the ASA accepted that Shreddies was not an excessively sugary or salty breakfast cereal, they did question the validity of the science on which Nestlé based its claims.

Nestlé said there were many studies highlighting how breakfast aided concentration, and that they had commissioned their own study showing Shreddies in a good light. This involved a small study of 29 male and female children aged between nine and 16 years. Over four days the children received four different breakfasts: a single bowl of Nestlé Shreddies (45g serving plus 125ml semi-skimmed milk); a single bowl of Nestlé Cheerios (30g serving plus 125ml of semi-skimmed milk); a 330ml orange-flavoured drink containing 38.3g glucose; and nothing.



Other evidence submitted by Nestlé related to a comparison between a low energy soft-drink and a yoghurt; and between having any breakfast and not having breakfast at all.

The ASA said it believed viewers *'would have expected the comparison to be between a range of different types of breakfast rather than between having breakfast or having nothing'*. The Authority accepted that the 'mental energy' of the children who ate Shreddies appeared to be improved in comparison with those who had an orange-flavoured sugar drink or nothing at all, but considered this comparison should have been made clear to avoid misleading viewers as to the extent of the study. The ASA concluded that the advert was likely to mislead viewers, and said that it should not appear again in its current form.

X Prunes promoted 'selectively'
The California Prune Board was censured by the ASA for a magazine advertisement that showed a jar of prunes crushing an orange. The text read: *'Bite for bite better than fresh fruit. When it comes to vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, Sunsweet Prunes really are bite for bite better than fresh fruit. Oranges really are taking the pith. Sunsweet Prunes contain more than 11 times the Vitamin E of any Orange. It's time to leave the wrinkles to the prunes. After all, if you eat smarter, you'll look and feel better'*. A graph compared levels of vitamin E, antioxidants, vitamin A, niacin B3 and potassium in apples, oranges and bananas with the levels in Sunsweet Prunes.

The California Prune Board sent tables of information to support its claims, which revealed that all fresh fruit contains higher levels of vitamin C than prunes; that oranges contain more thiamin-B1, more folate and more selenium than prunes; bananas and mangoes have more selenium; apricots more vitamin A; bananas had more vitamin B-6, more pantothenic acid, and more manganese; pineapples also had more manganese.

The ASA considered that 'the bar chart was selective', giving the California Prune Board an artificial advantage, which was misleading.

ASDA's price claims 'officially' misled viewers

X Tesco objected to press and TV advertisements for ASDA, describing ASDA as 'officially Britain's lowest prices supermarket'.

Tesco said the claim was misleading because it was based on a limited and unrepresentative survey (conducted by *The Grocer* magazine) analysing only 33 items. Tesco said this represented fewer than 0.001% of more than 40,000 lines typically sold by a national retailer. They also claimed the 33 lines selected did not represent 'a typical weekly shop', and sent the ASA an analysis of a 10% sample of the 45 million baskets they had sold in a four-week period after the end of the *Grocer's* survey.

The ASA agreed that 33 items were not enough to substantiate a general pricing claim; was concerned that, because the list of items in basket of goods was known, it was vulnerable to 'price chasing' by retailers; and considered that the omission of low-cost supermarkets from the survey prevented its results being valid substantiation for the claim.

The ASA also considered that the claim 'officially' implied the survey had been carried out by a government department, public authority, industry body or commercial body whose data commanded near-universal acceptance within the industry. Because it was not, it considered that the claim 'officially' was misleading.

● If you see food adverts or promotions you think are misleading, do send us a copy.

X Nestlé complaint update

The ASA ruled in favour of Nestlé after the Food Commission objected to an advert in a mother and baby magazine, showing a toddler's hand picking up Cheerio breakfast cereal, with the caption 'good eating habits are easy to pick up'.

Cereal Partners UK (trading as Nestlé) said the ad would appear in *Practical Parenting*, *Mother & Baby* and *Prima Baby* magazines at regular intervals throughout the year. Bizarrely, the ASA compared the high level of sugar in Cheerios to the amount of sugar in 'half a small banana', perhaps not realising that dietary advice distinguishes between extrinsic sugars (free sugars) and intrinsic sugars (those locked up in cells, as in fresh fruit). They also stated that whilst toddlers would receive a quarter of their daily intake of salt in a single serving of Cheerios, this would not be 'difficult to accommodate within a healthy diet for infants and children'.

X Pesticide dose 'not proven'

The ASA criticised an advert for Grove Fresh organic fruit juice headed 'Fruit juice now available in non-pesticide flavour', stating 'Every time you drink non-organic juice, you risk consuming a cocktail of chemical pesticide residues'. However, a surveillance report from the Government's Pesticides Residue Committee showed that, out of 120 samples of non-organic apple juice tested, only four contained pesticide residue. The ASA concluded that such evidence was not sufficiently robust to substantiate the implication that drinking non-organic juice puts people at risk of consuming pesticide residues. The advertisers were advised not to use such claims again.

X Lindt retracts heart health claim

When we found a claim in *BBC Good Food* magazine that eating Lindt chocolate 'protects against heart disease', we promptly sent a complaint to the ASA. Disease risk reduction claims are explicitly prohibited under UK law, on the understanding that no single food can prevent or cure disease.

The ASA wrote back saying that the Food Commission should provide evidence that the claim was untrue, and that anyway it is not their job to deal with legal cases, but only with cases likely to mislead.

We wrote back to say we were taken aback by this request, since we believed it incumbent on the advertiser to hold proof for such a strong claim as 'protects against heart disease', and that if Lindt felt confident to make claims that its product could prevent a disease, then it should apply for a medicines licence.

The ASA wrote back to say that since the Food Commission is an 'industry body', their rules stated that we would have to provide evidence that the claim was untrue. This rule is presumably in place to prevent expensive investigations resulting from spats between rival companies.

Last time such a difficulty came up, several years ago, we wrote to the ASA to explain that the Food Commission is not 'industry' and takes no money from industry – we represent the public. However, the ASA appears to have

no category for 'public interest groups' on their database. So we wrote to the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Authority, which governs the rules for medicines and medicinal labelling, to say there is a chocolate manufacturer that appears to have come up with a product that can prevent heart disease;

it should presumably have a licence, and what were they going to do about it.

The MHRA were very pleasant, but several months on and we have heard nothing further.

So we wrote to the trading standards officer responsible for Lindt, who has had a quiet word with the company, and they say they won't do it again. How nice.

But meanwhile, the claim has been circulated to the 100,000 readers of *BBC Good Food* magazine, and they will now presumably not hear

anything to counteract the unproven claim that eating chocolate can prevent heart disease.

We don't always agree with the processes and rulings of the ASA, but they do possess one effective weapon: bad publicity for bad claims.



DARK CHOCOLATE IS GOOD FOR YOU!

Dark chocolate is the healthiest way to satisfy a chocolate craving ... **Protects against heart disease** Eating 50g a day of dark chocolate, with a minimum content of 70% chocolate solids, can be beneficial to your blood pressure and cardiovascular system.

'White Van Man' in the bag

Paper bags have become yet another place to put marketing messages. This one came wrapped around a cheese and salad sandwich, from a sandwich shop in Islington. It reads like a rather poignant modern-day poem: *'Overslept. Late for work. Grab a quick bagel. Sifting junk emails. Endless presentations. Get quick burger. Rushing rushing rushing. Stuff office. Chocolate energy boost. Painful shoes. Endless roadworks. Sorry for the delay. Grab a coke.'*

The marketing message that emerges is: if you live a life like this, then you need Rennie indigestion tablets.

Or perhaps a chance to slow down, rethink your life and enjoy better food...

Bag Media, the company that arranges for marketing messages to be put onto paper bags, boasts that it has put advertising campaigns on more than a billion pieces of packaging – 'from Microsoft to Mars'. According to Bag Media, a sandwich bag such as the one for Rennie targets

'ABC1 office workers'. However, the company can also offer specially targeted bag distribution to appear on 'Café/greasy spoon bacon buttie bags', described as a 'The perfect media to target White Van Man. Media is collected and taken back to cab / car and placed on dashboard.'

And what products does Bag Media recommend are promoted to Café/Greasy Spoon Bacon Buttie White Van Man? The company says: 'This unique media is perfect for promoting confectionery and snacks, drinks or convenience products for those on the move.' The example the company gives is a bag with an advert for Snickers bars: 'Encouraging people to pick up a Snickers with their snacks.'

Make the beds Chocolate energy boost Endless roadworks Lazy secretaries
Missed EastEnders Laundry Rushed lunches Computer crashing Run in rain
Phone call salesmen All-you-can-eat buffets Home late again Double Scotch
Cheese and pickle Read bed time story Ironing Same flustered faces

Got a life? Got indigestion?
Get new Rennie Soft Chews.

Missed my stop Salt 'n' vinegar crisps Wash car Sleep on the train Out of order
Endless coffees Chinese take aways Jammed photocopier Infinite bus queues
Mow the lawn Frosty mornings Pay the bills Huge curry with beer Want it now
Phone constantly rings Working late Westbound delays Management waffle

The company also arranges for samples of products to be put into the bags with any products purchased. Sachets of Hellmann's Mayonnaise, for example, were distributed to fish & chip shops across the UK when the manufacturer Best Foods advertised on 12 million fish & chip takeaway bags in support of its TV campaign.

The aim was evidently to encourage consumers to try their chips dipped in extra fat.

London plans for better food access

Just over a year ago, the Food Strategy Unit of the London Development Agency asked the Food Commission to produce guidance on how town planners can help improve access to healthy and affordable food for people living on a low income. We worked in partnership with Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

At the end of September, we were asked to present the resulting guidance report at a launch and consultation event at City Hall in London, attended by planners, London health workers, community development officers, retail planners and policy makers. The event was an opportunity for these people to have their say about the overarching London Food Strategy – this is a document that sets out Mayor Ken Livingstone's bold vision for achieving a healthier and more sustainable food economy for the capital.

To develop the guidance for town planners, we interviewed local planners and other local authority officers. We also spoke to people working in primary care trusts, community organisations and academia. We visited areas of London and other cities with deprived areas where neighbourhood retailers face extreme difficulties maintaining trade due to high crime

rates and the effect of supermarkets attracting wealthier and physically mobile people out of the area. We also ran a consultation seminar for people working in community development for housing associations; and a seminar for people interested in supporting neighbourhood retailing to ensure that healthy and affordable food remains available in poor areas.

Our research led us to the conclusion that there is a plethora of ways in which planners can help improve food access. The guidance is also a shopping list for all those involved in improving food access – an outline of the kind of support they have both the right and opportunity to ask for from their local authority.

To have your say on the London Food Strategy, visit www.sustainweb.org/london_index.asp



Mark Ainsbury of London's Food Strategy Unit, and Claire Pritchard of Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency, at the London Development Agency's consultation event

Co-ops promote cheaper, healthier food

Running a food co-operative can be one positive way for groups of people to share the money-saving benefits of bulk purchasing, as Helen Sandwell found when she visited the Lammas Green Food Co-operative in south London.

Frustrated by a decline in the availability of good food locally, Gina Purmann decided to set up the Lammas Green Food Co-operative. She wanted to find new sources of healthy food – particularly bread.

The idea of a food co-operative is very simple. A group of people get together to order food at a reasonable price and share the goods and the savings. They can work at a national scale (the Co-op supermarket is an example) or can involve just a few families buying food and getting together to share it out.

Gina sees food co-ops as a good model for counteracting food poverty, to build a support for local food producers, and to fight back against the dominance of the supermarkets.

'Supermarkets seek any market whose demand they can fill as cheaply as possible and sell the products as expensively as possible,' she says. She considers that box and home delivery schemes can at least equal, and are likely to beat supermarkets when it comes to value and quality.

Gina contacted Infinity Foods in Brighton, which produces bread, and the group now uses them for a bulk order of non-perishable organic products and cheeses every six weeks or so. In addition, the co-op purchases an order from Hull-based Suma three to four times a year – mainly dry goods and products that cannot be bought more locally.

Individuals in the group vary as to where they source the rest of their food. Some use local shops and supermarkets, whereas Gina prefers to rely on home delivery, using fruit and veg box schemes run by Abel & Cole and Farmaround. *'My four and eight year olds could count on their fingers the number of times they've set foot in a supermarket,' she says, with a laugh.*

Individuals in the co-op tend to join for a while, learn the ropes, then go off and form their own group. When an order arrives it is delivered to Gina's house, and members meet there to divide it up. Gina considers the ideal size of a group to be around three members purchasing

large orders with three or four additional people taking smaller quantities. *'When a group becomes too big, it becomes unmanageable,' she says. 'There is a physical limit on order size dependent on the size of premises. There's also a limit to how much Infinity can fit on their van for us, because we don't order weekly. Dealing with the maths of the order is another factor.'*

Gina thinks such arrangements could make a huge difference to the diets of Londoners living in deprived areas. She is keen to see the promotion of food co-ops, fruit and veg box schemes and subscription farming. She also believes local authorities could play a role by developing a neighbourhood food co-op strategy. *'They could help disseminate food co-op guidance to relevant policy officers, local government officials and public and private sector organisations and support the promotion of real decision-making for all, ending reliance on supermarket economics.'*

● **Infinity Foods, tel: 01273 424060 www.infinityfoods.co.uk**
 ● **Suma, tel: 0845 458 2291 www.suma.co.uk**
 ● **Abel & Cole, tel: 08452 626262 www.able-cole.co.uk**
 ● **Farmaround, tel: 01748 821116 www.farmaround.co.uk**

EC butter scandal continues

In the late 1990s there was some consternation that the European Commission's figures for butter production and consumption were misrepresenting the real situation.

The European Court of Auditors was particularly anxious that Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) money was being wasted, and its investigation, published in 2000, showed there was considerable overproduction being encouraged by CAP support measures. The court was unhappy about the disposal measures for surplus butter, which effectively supported excess production while providing cheap ingredients for food manufacturers.

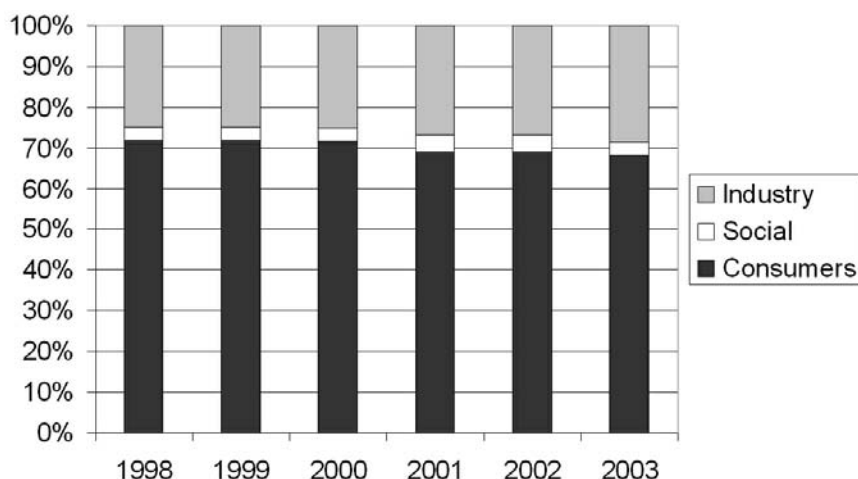
There was a clear market failure. While consumers were being urged by health professionals to cut their consumption of fatty foods, especially those rich in saturated fats (and butter is about as rich as it comes), the Commission was not only supporting overproduction, but was actively subsidising the surplus butter by selling it to industry at below-market costs. The industry happily pumped the extra butter into our food supply in the form of cakes, pastries, biscuits, ice cream and desserts.

This is now history, surely? Well, no, it isn't.

We have taken a look at the agricultural figures for the last half decade and found that the situation remains as bad as ever it was. Consumers have reduced their purchases of butter to the lowest levels yet, but the EC's intervention purchases have been steadily rising. In 2003 (the latest published figures) consumers bought 1.2m tonnes of butter at normal prices, while the EC purchased into intervention another 0.53m tonnes. The total being bought by the EC now amounts to nearly a third of all butter produced.

And while some of the intervention butter is given to welfare schemes and non-profit bodies – for lucky pensioners, hospital patients and school children to be dosed up with saturated fat – the greatest amount by far is

Butter trends 1998-2003 (% of total consumption) showing normal butter purchases (consumers), butter subsidised for social use (social) and butter sold cheaply to companies (industry)



sold off to food processors. The latest figures show a record 490,000 tonnes of butter (and cream) being sold off, some 92% of the surplus.

Milk production has become an intensive industry, requiring large amounts of home-grown and imported fodder, which in turn require large areas of land, water, pesticides and fuel. The ecological 'footprint' of butter is especially high: the footprint of resources needed to produce a tonne of vegetables is less than one hectare, a tonne of milk needs between one and two hectares, a tonne of meat some 20 hectares, but a tonne of butter some 30 hectares. Cutting the butter surplus could reduce Europe's agricultural footprint by a massive 15 million hectares – about half of France's agricultural land.

● **Source: The Agricultural Year 2004, European Commission, 2005.**



Buttery biscuits: Around half a million tonnes of subsidised butter and cream go into processed foods like these annually.



What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals

Breastfeeding cuts diabetes risk

A systematic review of studies of the effects of breastfeeding has shown several potential benefits for both mother and child with respect to the risk of diabetes. Breastfeeding lowers oestrogen levels in mothers, which may have a protective effect on glucose metabolism and subsequent risk of diabetes for those women. For the babies, having been breastfed for at least two months may lower the risk of diabetes in later childhood. Initial research has begun on the long-term effects of diabetes during pregnancy on children. Breastfeeding may lower both maternal and paediatric rates of diabetes. The review concludes that women with diabetes should be strongly encouraged to breastfeed because of maternal and childhood benefits specific to diabetes that are above and beyond other known benefits of breastfeeding.

● JS Taylor *et al*, 2005, *J Am Coll Nutr.* 24(5): 320-6

Weight gain is worse for women

The links between excess bodyweight and risk of major chronic diseases are well-known but a new study has attempted to investigate the other side of the same question: what are the bodyweights of healthy people? Data from over 11,000 non-smoking men and women were classified according to their general health (based on self-reported health, medical history,

measurements of blood pressure, blood lipids, serum glucose, glycosylated haemoglobin, and lifestyle behaviour) and the distribution of the group's body mass index (BMI) examined.

The healthiest set had a median BMI of 24.5 kg/m² for men and 21.5 kg/m² for women. The proportion that were overweight was lowest among the healthiest women, but showed little difference between the healthiest men and those categorised as less healthy. Outright obesity was low among the healthiest men and women alike.

KM Flegal, 2005, *Int J Obes* (online 27 Sept)

School teaching doesn't reduce obesity

An educational intervention in schools in Austria to reduce the prevalence of obesity among children increased student knowledge of health but did not reduce their obesity levels. The intervention was performed by a multi-professional team and covered 11 nutrition and health-related sessions, one hour per week in each class. Children's initial poor nutritional knowledge improved significantly – with better results in grammar schools compared to comprehensive schools. However, BMI was not reduced in overweight children.

S Damon *et al*, 2005, *Acta Paediatr Suppl.* 94(448): 47-8

Does breakfast help weight control?

A study of the eating habits and health of over 4,000 adults in the USA has attempted to determine whether breakfast-eating helps maintain a healthy bodyweight. Breakfast consumers were more likely than breakfast avoiders to be older, female, white, non-smokers, regular exercisers, and trying to control their weight.

For women, daily energy intake was higher among breakfast consumers than among breakfast non-consumers; however those that ate breakfast were less likely to be overweight than those that did not. A key component appeared to be cereals – those women who usually ate ready-to-eat cereals were least likely to be overweight. For men, breakfast-eating appeared to have little relationship to their bodyweight.

WO Song, 2005, *J Am Diet Assoc.* 105(9): 1373-82

Obesity prejudice in medicine

Obese people are less likely to receive preventive services, such as mammograms, cervical smears and flu vaccination from health care providers, according to researchers in the USA. For a sample of white, middle-class women, as BMI rose the odds of receiving check-up referrals went down. A normal-weight woman was 50% more likely to be referred for a mammogram screening than a severely obese woman.

T Ostbye, 2005, *Am J Public Health.* 95(9): 1623-30

Omega 6 link to prostate growth

Omega 6 fatty acids promote the growth of prostate tumour cells in laboratory cultures, researchers have found. The fatty acid appears to turn on a cascade of enzymes which leads to cell growth. Similar enzymes have been linked to colorectal cancer and some breast cancers. The study notes the change in the typical diet from a ratio of omega 6 to omega 3 of 1:2 before World War II to a ratio of 25:1 today. Prostate cancer incidence climbed steadily over the period.

M Hughes-Fulford *et al*, 2005, *Carcinogenesis.* 26(9): 1520-6

Juice good for Alzheimer's disease

Antioxidants abundant in fruit and vegetable juices may help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease. In a nine-year study of 1,800 older men and women, who were free of dementia at the start of the period, those who drank fruit or vegetable juice at least three times a week had a 75% reduced risk of developing the disease compared with those who drank juice less frequently.

Dietary supplements of antioxidants C, E or beta-carotene appeared to have no effect. Fruit and vegetables were also less effective. The authors suggest this may be because commercial juices often include the skin and pith of the fruit which would not usually be eaten (e.g. orange skin and pith), which contain valuable bio-active chemicals such as polyphenols.

AR Borenstein, *Alzheimer's Association*, 19 June 2005 (aborenst@hsc.usf.edu)

Statins affect omega 3:6 ratio

Treatment of cardiac patients with cholesterol-lowering drugs may adversely affect their blood profiles for omega 3 and omega 6. A trial of the drug simvastatin showed omega 6 fatty acid arachidonate rose but linoleate fell. Omega 3 remained unaffected. An alternative type of treatment, using the drug fenofibrate, had similar effects on the omega 6 fatty acids, and also led to a fall in omega 3 fatty acids alpha-linolenate and docosahexanoate. Compensating with more dietary omega 3 may be helpful, say the authors.

M de Lorgeril *et al*, 2005, *Nutr Metab Cardiovasc Dis.* 15(1): 36-41



books

Dictionary of Food Science and Technology

International Food Information Service (IFIS), Blackwell Publishing Ltd (www.blackwellpublishing.com), July 2005, ISBN 1405125055, £75 hardback

Produced to satisfy the needs of academia and the food industry this dictionary contains a huge

range of both common and not-so-common definitions. Five years in the making, this first edition includes thousands of definitions of food commodities (natural, prepared and processed), as well as terms more specific to food science and technology (e.g.

sensory analysis, food composition, nutrition and food safety).

The recent impact of biotechnology is not ignored, with terms relating to genetic engineering and novel foods included. We're not sure why the over-hyped brand Yakult should be awarded the credibility of a definition in such a dictionary, especially as other brand names are ignored, but otherwise this is a useful and comprehensive dictionary which will be of value to students and researchers alike.

Public spending for public benefit

New Economics Foundation, July 2005, ISBN 1-904882-02-1, £5. Free download from publications section of <http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/>

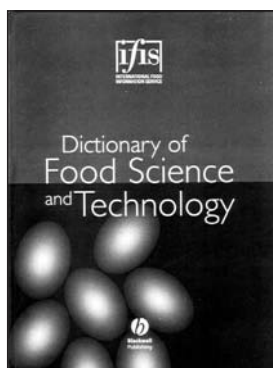
This is a nicely-designed booklet for campaigners and lobbyists aiming to get the public sector to play a full role in economic development.

The UK public sector spends £125bn annually delivering goods and services. The New Economics Foundations says that if we ensured

that just a tenth of this money was directed into the country's most deprived areas it would amount to over 17 times the current regeneration spending. But how to do this: how can public services stimulate local development?

The section on food helps clarify the thinking here. It's all about local sourcing, explain the authors. Schools, hospitals, local authorities and other public bodies can use their budgets to 'buy local', thereby keeping money circulating in the local economy, boosting employment and commercial activity.

Several case studies are given, showing the benefits to the local economy of buying local. For example, a consortium of NHS trusts in Cornwall pooled their purchasing power to support local food producers, maintaining small farms and rural livelihoods. Relations with small businesses were more personalised and mutually supportive. And hospital patients were pleased with the real Cornish ice cream!



BSE: risk, science and governance

P van Zwanenberg and E Millstone. Oxford University Press (www.oup.com), 2005, ISBN 0-19-852581-8, £35 hardback

When scientists lack clear answers, politicians will soon invent their own. And the answers that politicians find – and their departments and officials – will be chosen to suit particular parties: themselves, of course, and those they wish to protect.

Political interference in science is hardly news. But the intriguing story told in Zwanenberg and Millstone's book on the 20-year BSE crisis shows how scientists themselves get caught up in the fantasy world of spin and word play.

The book – which draws heavily on the Phillips Enquiry into BSE and on a wealth of early and subsequent documents – meticulously details the controlling influence of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and its dual role of regulating and promoting UK farming, and the slow, late entrance of the Department of Health into food policy-making. MAFF's heavy hand was stamped on all policies from the first denials of the disease in 1985-6 until BSE's impact on human health was undeniable, in 1995-6.

MAFF had form already, having long allowed its scientific advisory committees to be captured by 'experts' with close links to the food industry. And MAFF's dark side showed itself

frequently: attacking Edwina Curry for daring to criticise filthy egg production, and pouring scorn on the likes of Professor Richard Lacey for exposing the bullying that occurred in advisory committees.

The point of focusing on BSE is that it encapsulates the points the authors need to make: that science is not 'above' politics but is up to its elbows in the same dirty business. And it is a mistake to assume that food policy works the way the text books describe, with scientists providing objective risk assessments, followed by policy-makers deciding the best course of dealing with risk, and stakeholders (such as industry) brought in at the end to implement the policies. The industry is there at the beginning – indeed before the beginning – by employing the scientists as consultants, making grants to their departments, endowing their chairs and paying for their students' research.

The governance of risk is thus a matter of recognising the nature of the game, making it transparent and thereby improving its answerability to the wider community. When scientific evidence is called upon to inform a policy choice, we need to know the grubby details.

These were the specific lessons from BSE identified by the Phillips Enquiry, but the new

book goes on to generalise the theme. Elsewhere, Millstone has argued that scientific evidence can support policy or it can undermine policy, but it cannot by itself settle policy. This is because policy also needs goals, decided by society and its representatives. In the present book, the authors make clear that scientific evidence is itself affected by society – the research choices, the funding sources and even the privileges given to researchers in favour with government – all shape the evidence that emerges from the scientific endeavour.

And when the evidence is clearly tainted or only partial, what do we do? If the BSE saga teaches us anything, it shows that we need a clear policy on how to deal with an absence of acceptable evidence. We still don't have one.



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

That type's too small!

The declaration on the Sunmagic orange juice pack that it is 'made from concentrated orange juice' (FM70) would seem to be printed in something less than a print size of 3 point, (3 point = approx 1mm). At this size it is very difficult even for a person with good eyesight to read. For a consumer with some form of sight impairment it may be impossible to read.

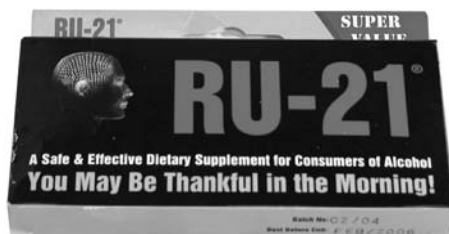
In other industries in the EU there is a legally required minimum print size of 6 point, (approx 2mm) – the exception being Germany, which demands 7 points. Even this is felt by many to be at the lower end of legibility. In this instance, one can only conclude that the Sunmagic brand owner has something to hide and the product should be viewed accordingly.

Joseph Siddall, Brentwood

The Sunmagic declaration that it is 'made from concentrated orange juice' – actual size:

(The text is too small to read in this image)

The authorities in this country seem loath to set exact type sizes or criteria to help the two million or so of us with visual impairments, and the 58 million or so of us who wouldn't be able to read this incredibly small type in any case! Take a look on page 24 for some more examples of ludicrously small type. Arguably, the information might as well not be there.



Are you 21?

I think this product is disgraceful. I got it in Boots in Leamington Spa. Even the pharmacist thought it was bad – and she couldn't tell me any more about what it is for. I'm assuming it is American, because people there aren't legally allowed to drink alcohol until they are 21 years old, and the name is 'RU-21'?

It claims to be a 'dietary supplement for consumers of alcohol' and says 'you may be thankful in the morning'. I really doubt it!

The label shows it is mainly monosodium glutamate (MSG), vitamin C and sugar. It's covered in warnings saying that it can't prevent intoxication, but advises: 'take one tablet with every alcoholic beverage at time of consumption'. Why?!

It doesn't say what function it performs, and there is no leaflet to say if there are any side effects. Is this just quackery?

Kate Dunn, Worcester

Boots is one of the UK's most trusted brands, but that doesn't necessarily mean you can always trust what it sells. The fact that this extraordinary product doesn't list any actual benefits is probably because there aren't any. For those who have drunk enough alcohol to cause a hangover, drinking a glass of water before they go to bed will do better in combating dehydration and a headache. Perhaps pharmacists should be allowed to have more control of the types of products sold on shop shelves, and not just in the pharmacy area.

Say it with vegetables

I am a long-term member of the HDRA's Heritage Seed Library, which is a national treasure-house of 800 old and unusual varieties of vegetables. They have come up with such a good idea for Christmas presents – I thought you might like to share it with your readers.

They're saying people can help the seed library stay open by adopting a vegetable! There's a serious side to it. I think people forget how important it is that we preserve variety in the plants we grow and eat. I read somewhere that the human race now relies on just nine or ten main plants for most of its food. I'm no biologist, but it can't be good to put all of our eggs in one basket (as it were). I think the Heritage Seed Library is worthy of support.

A gift pack for £12 includes a certification of adoption for one year, the person's name entered in the Adoption Book held at Ryton Organic Gardens, a brief history of the variety, information on the Heritage Seed Library's work and a gift card designed by artist-in-residence Lesley Davis. The vegetables have wonderful names such as Cabbage 'Paddy'; Cabbage 'Webb's Kinver Globe'; Lettuce 'Northern Queen'; Pea 'Holland Capucijners'; Tomato 'Bonny Best' and Tomato 'Tiger Tom'. Further details about Adopt a Veg or the Heritage Seed Library call 024 7630 3517 or visit www.hdra.org.uk.

Neil Roberts, Swindon

What are all these sodium ingredients?

I'm beginning to realise that I need to consider the nutritional information with regards to the food I consume. Could you inform me as to which types of sodium are incorporated into food products? I do not like the prospect of consuming food products with sodium carbonate, sodium chlorate, sodium nitrate/nitrite and sodium benzoate corrupting what I consider to be my healthy lifestyle. Can you advise? It's just that I never looked at the label (nutritional information) before.

Marie-Claire Oliver, Bath

The sodium compounds you list are all additives put into food for functional reasons, as follows:

- Sodium carbonate is usually added to balance the acidity or alkalinity of a product. It is also used as a raising agent in the form of sodium bicarbonate.
- Sodium chlorate is used to control bacteria, mold and yeast.
- Sodium nitrate / nitrite are often found in cured meats such as bacon – again, to prevent bacterial growth.

Fitness in a bar?

You often point out (quite rightly) how stupid it is that processed food manufacturers should say that there's no such thing as a bad food. I keep seeing processed foods that are quite clearly marketed as if they are 'good' foods.

I thought you might like to see the enclosed – Fitness in a box! My daughter bought it in Lidl, knowing how much I like barmy food labels. All it seems to be is a mixture of some starchy stuff, marzipan, apple and countless added vitamins. OK, it's not that bad. But how can this equate to fitness?

Ros Martins, Dorset



feedback

letters from our readers

- Sodium benzoate is very widely used in soft drinks as a preservative.

There's some controversy as to whether the sodium in these compounds contributes to effects such as raised blood pressure, associated with over-consumption of sodium as common salt (sodium chloride) in the diet. The main source of sodium is added salt in processed foods such as bread and cereals. Around 75% of our sodium intake comes from processed foods.

Tackling wasteful plastic wrappers

I read with interest the letter from David Crawford in the July/Sept issue of the *Food Magazine* regarding the use of plastic wrappers for postage of the magazine. You may be interested to know of a company who will recycle polythene wrappers and bags (including food wrappers). The company name and address is:

Polyprint Mailing Films,
Mackintosh Road, Rackheath Industrial Estate,
Rackheath, Norwich NR13 6LJ

The company will happily receive clean polythene wrappers with all paper labels removed first and have been helpful in the past when I contacted them about a recycling project our village school was undertaking.

Good Luck with the recycling!

Hilary Schmidt-Hansen, Stratford upon Avon

Thanks as well to readers Mrs Graham-Rack and David Linnell who also let us know about Polyprint Mailing Films. A spokesperson for the company confirmed that they are happy to receive any type 2 or 4 plastics (the soft, stretchy types) but did ask, as Hilary points out above, that any paper labels are removed before you send the plastic for recycling.

PAN Memorial Lecture

The Pesticides Action Network Rachel Carson Memorial Lecture will take place on 1st December 2005.

The event will feature a lecture by Professor Tyrone B. Hayes about his ground-breaking research showing that low levels of a widely used weedkiller Atrazine have a potent effect on the hormonal system, linked to prostate cancer in men and breast cancer in women.

The lecture will take place at Middle Temple Hall in London, 6.30pm. Tickets cost £30 and include an organic buffet and wine.

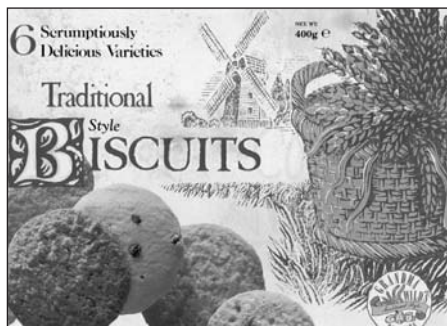
Call: 020 7065 0905

Email: admin@pan-uk.org

How traditional are trans fats?

It makes me cross to see hydrogenated fat in the ingredients list of these supposedly 'traditional' biscuits. Grandma Wild's biscuits even has the cheek to say that they are 'baked to old recipes which have been used by us for over 90 years, using only the finest ingredients available'. I'm sorry, but hydrogenated fat is not a 'fine' ingredient in my book.

Miryam Stennard, Wiltshire



Hydrogenation was introduced in the early 1900s, so this company may have used this ingredient for over 90 years! The difference is that when hydrogenation was invented, people were not aware of the health effects. Now that they are aware, manufacturers should be working to eliminate these fats from the food chain.

We note that hydrogenated fat is the second ingredient in these biscuits by weight, which is especially concerning. The harmful effect of consuming hydrogenated fats is acknowledged by everyone, and there's really no excuse for hiding behind the notion of 'moderation' or 'occasional treats'.

Don't trust the labels

In our article on salty desserts in FM70 the Food Commission's researchers used sodium declarations on product labels to calculate the salt content of puddings. We are concerned that salt is hidden in places that people don't expect.

We have since discovered that both the Rumlbers Bio yogurt and Morrisons own-brand tinned Strawberry Sponge Pudding had been mis-labelled by their manufacturers.

According to the companies, Rumlbers Bio yogurts contain 0.45g salt per serving, not the 3.2g indicated by the label. The Morrisons Strawberry Sponge Puddings contain 0.6g salt per serving and not 6.0g as indicated by the label. Whilst we are pleased that these products are not as high in salt as they appeared, we are disappointed that the Morrisons product is *still* a high salt product (based on FSA guidelines).

Can I eat salt to my heart's content?

These soya crisps (pictured above) tasted very salty when I tried them – I've pretty much

reduced my salt intake recently and we never add it when cooking now. I was attracted to the crisps because I was told that eating soya is good for your heart, and there are lots of heart-healthy messages on the pack. But salt isn't good for your heart. That's right, isn't it? And they do seem very salty. I'm confused.

Rob Sallis, Hebden Bridge

The soya heart health claims that appear on the pack are 'approved' claims that have been assessed by an organisation called the Joint Health Claims Initiative (JHCI: www.jhci.org.uk).

They examined the scientific evidence, and decided that eating 25g of soya protein per day as part of a diet low in saturated fat can help reduce blood cholesterol and maintain a healthy heart.

But you're right – high salt consumption is linked to raised blood pressure, which in turn is linked to heart problems. That's why the JHCI would generally discourage approved health claims on products that contain high levels of potentially damaging components such as saturated fat and salt.

The soya crisps are relatively low in saturated fat, but very high in salt. The official guideline is that a product contains 'a lot' of salt if it has 0.5g of sodium per 100g or more. This product has 1.7g of sodium per 100g – more than three times the amount considered to be 'a lot'. Salt & vinegar crisps do tend to be the saltiest of the lot, so perhaps you could seek out different flavours.



Dame Sheila McKechnie Award for Community Food Initiatives

The Food Standards Agency will honour the influential campaigner Dame Sheila McKechnie, who died in January 2004, with an annual award that will provide two community food initiatives with £15,000 over a three year period. These awards are designed to aid projects that work within a local community to help solve issues around food inequality. Full details and an application pack can be downloaded from www.food.gov.uk or obtained by emailing mckechnieward@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk. Alternatively phone The Consumer Insight Team on 020 7276 8170. The deadline for applications is 5th December 2005.



backbites



Strokes of genius

Two clinical trials have shown that cocoa flavanols can increase blood flow to the brain, which may help in the treatment of strokes and elderly dementia. A rich source of flavanols is chocolate. The flavanols may also have a mild aspirin-like effect, helping prevent platelet aggregation and maintain blood flow.

And the funders of the research? Masterfoods, makers of Mars bars.

EFSA's stakeholders

The European Food Safety Authority is inviting organisations to participate in their Stakeholder Consultative Platform.

Well, not quite. If you want to attend you can apply to be an associate member and then may be invited on a 'topic-related and case-by-case basis'. And you will pay your own attendance costs.

Only a few organisations can be full members and EFSA has already made its mind up over the 24 participants who can have this higher status. We took a look at the list. The privileged participants include one consumer group, one public health group, one trade union group, four environmental organisations, and no less than seventeen commercial bodies and industry front groups.

(And one of these, EuroCommerce, describes itself as 'The voice of commerce in Brussels'. This won't help it much, as EFSA recently opened its offices in Parma, Italy.)

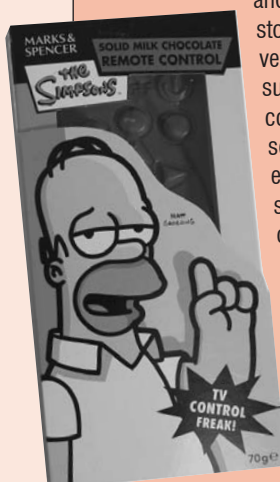
Remote-controlled calories

In the previous issue, we reported on the enormous amount of calorific food and drink promoted in Blockbusters, including 'two for one' offers on large-sized chocolate, crisps and coke. The video rental store looked more like a very unhealthy supermarket. We commented that there was something of an irony in encouraging people to stuff their faces with calories when their energy expenditure over the next few hours will be at the 'hard to detect' end of the scale.

Does Marks & Spencer have a similar sense of irony? We found this

confectionery product at

the checkout in our local branch. A 380 calorie solid milk chocolate TV remote control unit, promoted by Homer Simpson.



Coca-Cola hires fruity new image

In July, Coca-Cola hired a new chief marketing officer. Now, this is no joke. We did check. His name is Chuck Fruit.

The press release we received contained the memorable phrase 'Fruit is widely liked and admired'. In which case, let's hope he decides to put more of it in their drinks.

Investigating the links between people's names and jobs is an amusing way to pass a lunch hour. So it's also our pleasure to remind readers that the chief marketing officer for McDonald's is the somewhat portly Larry Light.



Larry Light



Chuck Fruit



Mary Dillon

However, it seems that poor old Larry Light no longer fits the image of New McDonald's. By the end of the year, he will be replaced by Mary Dillon, who will become chief marketing officer and executive vice president.

McDonald's reports that Mary is a fitness and running enthusiast, married and a mother of four, and that she used to work in marketing for Quaker. She will assume leadership of the McDonald's Balanced Lifestyles Initiative. How nice.

Biscuit ingredients are too small to see!

The food industry's Institute for Grocery Distribution (IGD) gives the following advice to food manufacturers about legibility: 'The label is the principal source of consumer information. When creating a label consider carefully what information is helpful and important to the consumer and ensure this is prominent, concise and clearly expressed.'

It goes on to advise on type size, layout and colour contrasts between type and background, and the challenges that many people face (especially older people) when trying to read poorly presented information. In the UK, around two million people have a visual impairment or are blind.

Consider, then, these two types of cream-filled cocoa biscuits, purchased in an east London supermarket. For the Negro biscuits, the manufacturer provides ingredients information in 12 different languages in a panel 94mm by 16mm – approximately 400 words in all. Even for people with perfect vision, the words are little more than a blur, especially as they are printed on a shiny background.

For the Biskrem biscuits, the panel is 102mm by 16mm, also containing about 400 words, again in several languages. We can't say how many because this label is pretty

much impossible to read. The letters are in dark gold on a black background, and all in capital letters so that there are no word shapes to hint at the meaning. A magnifying glass did help us to make out the words 'hydrogenated' and 'palm oil'.



The box below is also 102mm by 16mm. Just like the biscuit labels, it contains about 400 words of advice – this time on legibility, from the IGD. Perhaps the manufacturers should get their own magnifying glasses out and have a go at reading them.

Note: To see the IGD's advice in full size, go to the website www.igd.com and type 'legibility' into the search facility

When creating a label consider carefully what information is helpful and important to the consumer and ensure this is prominent, concise and clearly expressed without compromising legal requirements. A succinct phrase can be better than a complex one to get the message across. Inappropriate text size, colour contrasts and texture can lead to poor legibility. However, new technologies in print, packaging and point of sale are constantly evolving and should be used to enhance legibility. The label is the principal source of consumer information. Other sources can supplement and explain information, such as websites, customer centres, leaflets and in-store information. Multi-language labels need particular attention to ensure consistency between different languages or alphabets, and easy identification of the consumer's chosen language. Recommendations are designed to provide practical guidance to the industry in order to help consumers. Consumers have different requirements when shopping. Providing relevant information is an important factor in assisting consumer choice. The overall pack and the layout of information are the first point of contact to convey important features about the product to the consumer. Following a standardised format may be the ideal but is not always practical. Therefore each pack should accommodate a hierarchy of information, giving priority to safety information and also to the statutory field of vision requirements. It is vital to consider how the consumer will view products, such as in the trolley, on shelf or loose. Important visual cues for the consumer include branding and product name. Statutory information such as product description, variety and flavour, also assists consumer choice. Key information can be more clearly identified in frames or panels and by the use of headings in the context of the total area available. Clear separation of different languages on multi-language packs is particularly desirable. The use of colour is important to create visual contrast and to focus on key information. Clear and considered text layout can significantly enhance on-pack communication. For short, punchy messages the use of bold typefaces, bullet points and italics can enhance legibility. However these should be used selectively as too many can obscure the message. Consumers get reading cues from the shape and thought of letters, so a structured mixture of upper and lower case is more legible than the use of upper case alone. Consider the use of blocks to draw the eye to key areas of text. Consider typefaces specifically drawn for use at small sizes.