

The

# FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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## Ofcom reneges on child health

**O**fcom, the broadcasting regulator, has reneged on a government commitment to protecting children from junk food advertising, flouting the wishes of the majority of parents; snubbing the consensus opinion of public health professionals; wasting countless hours of parliamentary and civil servant time; and broken apparent promises by government to regulate junk food advertising to children.

Under its regulatory principles, Ofcom says that it 'will intervene where there is a specific statutory duty to work towards a public policy goal which markets alone cannot achieve'. In 2003, it was charged with investigating how to achieve the public policy goal of improving children's diets and attitudes towards food choices, in an area in which it is quite clear that unregulated markets alone cannot achieve public objectives: junk food advertising. The review was put forward amongst a suite of measures by the Department of Health (many of them reported in this issue of the *Food Magazine*, with happier results), to promote healthier food and to curb the influence of unhealthy food promotion. Specifically, Ofcom was asked to look into options for how food advertising could be regulated to protect children from unhealthy messages.

Media headlines at the time reassured parents and concerned health professionals: 'Junk food ads banned to fight fat epidemic'.

Over two years after being given this task, and extensive consultation (which we contend has been shown to be a charade), Ofcom has at last published its options. But the one option that had backing from the vast majority of public health organisations is not even on the table for discussion. The broad coalition of support for a ban on junk food advertising for children has stated quite clearly: The only option that they would support is a ban on junk food advertising up to the 9pm watershed. But they will not be

given a chance to support this under Ofcom's flimsy set of options.

This breath-taking omission comes at a time when in other food sectors, momentum is beginning to grow for improved nutrition and protection of children from other forms of unhealthy marketing.

### Decades of debate

Vast amounts of parliamentary time and public effort had already been put into investigating the effects of advertising on children's attitudes to food and food choices. The debates have run for nigh on 20 years. Jeanette Longfield of Sustain, formerly coordinator of the National Food

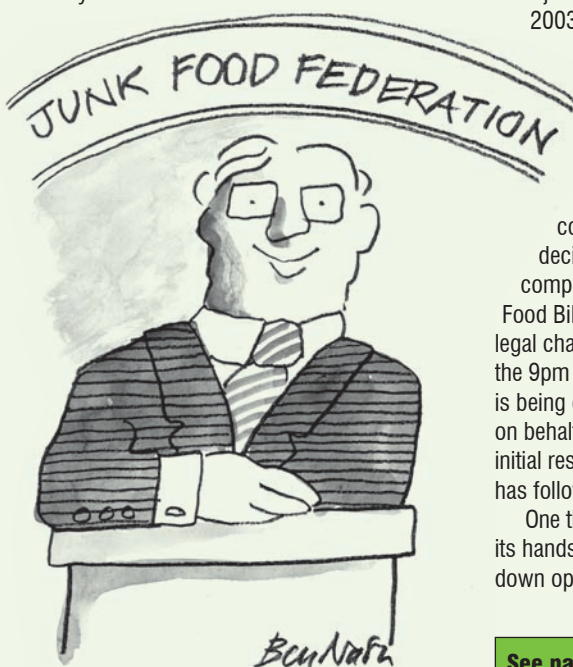
Alliance, reports that an earlier coalition against junk food advertising was involved with a lobby of Ofcom's predecessor, the Independent Television Commission, back in the 1990s.

Momentum and public concern built over the following decade until, at the time of Ofcom's commission to review advertising options in 2003, children's nutrition was rarely out of the papers. The Food Commission's Parents Jury was passing its judgements on junk food and junk marketing practices. The Children's Food Bill campaign was getting in full swing. The House of Commons Select Committee on Obesity was hearing incredible protestations of innocence from junk food manufacturers and marketers.

2003 also saw publication of the seminal 'Hastings Review', the first systematic review of evidence for the effects of marketing on children's diets and food preferences.

Yet despite its stated aim 'to further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters', Ofcom has decided to side with the industry. We have complained. Our colleagues in the Children's Food Bill have complained. As we go to press, a legal challenge to Ofcom's decision to exclude the 9pm watershed option from the consultation is being considered by the National Heart Forum on behalf of public health professionals. Ofcom's initial response has been to say that it believes it has followed all necessary procedures.

One thing is certain. Ofcom will have a fight on its hands if it thinks it can get away with watered down options for the future of children's health.



*"We have deep pockets gentlemen, and Ofcom's in one of them!"*

See pages 12 and 13 for further analysis of Ofcom's options. To add your voice to the call for Ofcom to review its position, see: [www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk)

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

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## Government suspends health lifeline

**T**he growing crisis in NHS budgets has made national headlines, with cuts in staff and threatened hospital closures around the country.

These are outward warnings of a need for a tightening of belts, and restrictions in what the NHS can deliver for patients. Lean times are ahead.

The financial crisis has also sent ominous ripples through the network of not-for-profit organisations that increasingly provide primary services, disease-prevention activities and public information campaigns to improve the nation's health. Uniquely, they provide a friendly and trustworthy route to raising public awareness and changing behaviour – seemingly impossible challenges for government. Many of these organisations receive contracts and grants from the Department of Health; some rely on this funding.

Such publicly funded activities are feeling the aftershock of the NHS financial crisis. Over 300 health organisations have been waiting since the beginning of January to find out if funding bids to the Department of Health have been successful. As we go to press, there is some indication that standing commitments will be honoured; but decisions on future Section 64 Grants have been delayed, with no indication of when the situation might change. The language may seem obscure, but the meaning is all too real. Disease prevention activities funded by the public purse should now, officially, be put on hold. Section 64 is a Department of Health grants programme introduced in 1968 *'to help voluntary organisations whose work supports the Government's health and social care goals'*.

As well as providing health services and public information, the job of the not-for-profit, non-governmental health sector is also to keep up pressure on government and industry to ensure that positive steps are taken to improve public health and environmental policy. Such work involves monitoring, advocacy, work with journalists and the media, drafting policy proposals, innovative research, national and international networking and alliance-building, and even direct creation of public policy, such as drafting legislation and drumming up political support to see it through into law.

Sadly, it is all too easy for funders to feel that food and health are matters of individual choice, and therefore not worthy of public or charitable money spent trying to change the system. Yet support for such activities is vital, especially in light of an all-too-apparent government bias towards deregulation and 'voluntary codes of practice'.

The Food Commission does not accept money from government for its campaigns and policy work (and neither from the food industry). But still, we are already feeling the tremors of the NHS budget crisis. Cutbacks mean not only fewer hospital beds. Suspension of Section 64 grants will remove a foundation stone from public health campaign work.

Whilst the Food Commission will not lose out directly to suspended or reduced funds from the Department of Health, many of our close associates will – the people and organisations who provide the backbone to health campaign work in the UK. (We should pause to say, once again that we thank you, our readers, for supporting our work through your subscription to the *Food Magazine* and kind donations).

Lean times will have more profound effects on public policy. The Food Commission has been approached several times by senior civil servants in recent years, specifically to urge that the non-governmental sector make 'more noise' so that progressive policy can be driven through by forward-thinking policy-makers. Some express frustration that current government direction has created an environment in which it is all but impossible to challenge the food, farming, retail and food marketing industries to do their bit to improve public health, especially for children.

The Department of Health might wish to see a strong public voice represented at the negotiating table, to help them stand up to the food industry. But without support for campaign activities that focus on removing the root causes of disease in our industrialised food system, NHS costs of treating the diseases will continue to spiral out of control.

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

### Advertising policy

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# Unlabelled GM soya discovered in a wide variety of foods

## Foods made with soya mince or TVP are more likely than not to contain traces of genetically modified soya.

A survey of soya-based ingredients used in a wide range of vegetarian and meat products as well as bread and biscuits has found the majority of samples to contain traces of Monsanto's genetically modified Roundup-Ready soya.

Levels were below the legal amount that would require labelling, but above the minimum level detectable in laboratory tests.

The survey, conducted by the government's Food Standards Agency (FSA), looked at 60 samples collected from manufacturing companies by inspectors in 14 local authorities around the UK. Thirty-eight samples were positive for GM soya, but the amounts were too small to be reliably quantified.

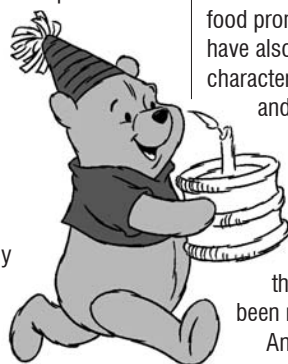
A further six samples – one in ten – contained GM soya at levels that were high enough to be quantified, averaging around 0.1%. This is below the level required for on-label declaration under EU regulations (set at 0.9% to allow for 'adventitious' contamination).

The survey focused on soya flour, soya protein, soya mince and textured vegetable protein, which are used as binders and bulking agents in meat products and as meat substitutes in vegetarian savoury products, as well as being used in a range of other foods including bread improvers and bakery mixes.

The survey results for the six samples with quantifiable GM soya are shown below.

Other companies trading in soya products with lower levels of GM (below the quantifiable threshold) included:

- All & All Ingredients
- Arkady Craigmillar
- Baco Northern Area
- BakeMark
- BFP Wholesale
- Community Foods
- East EBLQ Foods
- Food Ingredient Technology
- Hider Food Imports
- J&R Dalziell
- Kallo Foods
- National Food Ingredients
- Perfecta
- Suma Foods
- Zee Tandia



**Winnie the Pooh continues to help promote cakes and biscuits to little children**

# Disney hesitates over junk-food ban

In May, the national press hinted that Disney might cease to associate its popular children's characters with junk food, after the entertainment company ended its 10-year partnership with McDonald's. A change of heart? We fear not.

It is over two years since the Food Commission's Parents Jury shamed the BBC into withdrawing Teletubbies and Tweenies from promoting junk food. Not only did Disney fail to attend a special meeting that we set up with the BBC, Food Standards Agency and leading character-licensing companies to discuss concerns about the nutritional value of children's food promoted with children's characters, they have also been busy arranging for Disney characters to appear on sugary confectionery and snacks aimed at young children.

Cartoon confectionery is a regular item in Disney Stores; Winnie the Pooh biscuits and cakes are available in many mainstream supermarkets such as Asda and Tesco; and in recent years, the company's cartoon characters have been regular give-away toys with fast food.

Animation companies such as Disney make millions of pounds from 'character licensing'; payments to allow their copyright characters to appear on children's products, and Disney is one of the major players in

the character-licensing field.

Disney Consumer Products is the business department of the Walt Disney Company (or rather, empire) that extends the Disney brand to merchandise ranging from clothing, toys, home décor and books to games, food and drinks, stationery and electronics. Marketing is ratcheted up by Disney's subsidiary businesses: Disney Toys, Disney Softlines, Disney Hardlines, Disney Home, Disney Publishing, Buena Vista Games, Baby Einstein, the Muppets Holding Company and Disney Shopping's catalogue and website.

McDonald's and Disney both denied that the end of their deal related to health concerns, and Disney said that the two companies may work together again in the future. A McDonald's spokeswoman revealed more by announcing: *'The only thing that's changing is that it's no longer an exclusive arrangement.'*

Parents should therefore resign themselves to continued arguments with toddlers nagging for sugary snacks featuring popular Disney characters.

**Disney has not yet followed the BBC's lead by banning junk-food promotions associated with pre-school characters**



Manufacturer	Ingredient	Origin of ingredient
Sleaford Quality Foods	Textured soya mince	Brazil
Cargill Foods	TVP	Netherlands
Solae Group	Soya protein isolate	Belgium
Solae Group	Soya protein isolate	USA
Solae Group	TVP	USA
Kerry Ingredients	Soya flour – TVP	Brazil

# Poland rejects genetically modified crops

The Polish government has stated its opposition to the development of genetically modified (GM) crops in Poland, although it will not prevent GM produce being imported into the country. A recent poll by Greenpeace found that 76% of Polish consumers are opposed to GM crops.

The Polish government said that it is opposed to the cultivation of genetically modified maize, rape, sugar, beet, potatoes and soya. *'Poland should be in principle a country free of genetically modified organisms,'* the Polish cabinet said in a statement.

However, the cabinet also said that it will allow GM food to be imported *'on condition it is clearly marked, and providing there is no possibility it is transformed'* into other products.

In February the World Trade Organisation ruled that Europe had violated international trade rules by banning GM food imports between 1999 and 2003, a ruling welcomed by the US food industry that claimed the EU ban has cost them some \$300 million a year in lost sales.

However, the EU has consistently denied the existence of a moratorium, citing that no official communication to this effect has ever been made.

Undeterred by international wrangling, several local councils in Britain (e.g. Cornwall) have declared themselves GM-Free areas. They advise farm tenants of the Council's anti-GM position; ban GM food from local food services such as school meals and residential homes; and aim to be excluded from growing certain GM crops.



# FSA retreats from battle with salt sellers

The UK Food Standards Agency's long-awaited recommendations for reduced salt consumption revealed a retreat from their previous proposals which set tough limits on the sodium content of popular processed foods.

The FSA's original proposals, published in 2005, set tough targets for a range of products, but these have now been relaxed for 85 food types. For example, under the original proposals the amount of salt allowed in 100g of potato crisps was set at 1.4g but this has now jumped to 3.4g. In sausages the maximum was 1.4g salt per 100g but this has jumped up to 1.8g salt.

Professor Graham MacGregor, chairman of the campaign group Consensus Action on Salt and Health ([www.hyp.ac.uk/cash/](http://www.hyp.ac.uk/cash/)) said 'The power of the food industry is once again in evidence and the purely commercial interests of food companies have been allowed to prevail. There are no reasons why salt content of foods cannot be reduced much further.'

The FSA's Director of Consumer Choice and Dietary Health, Gill Fine, said she was 'pleased with the work done by many parts of the industry to enable us all to reduce our salt intake' and said the new guidance was the next step in the FSA's programme for salt reduction. The original proposals had been aimed at reducing average UK salt consumption to under 6g per day. In an acknowledgement that the new targets may fail to reach this goal, Fine said the FSA would 'review the targets in 2008 to ensure that progress continues to be made'.

Ms Fine worked for nine years as a nutritionist at supermarket chain Sainsbury's where she

became Head of Food and Health, and should know more than most how to keep the industry on track. However, the FSA acknowledged it had held 'consultations with more than 250 organisations together with a range of consumer groups, public health bodies and independent food technologists' – which rather implies that the 250 were mostly from the commercial sector, an astounding number of 'consultations' and suggesting a fierce onslaught upon the Agency.

**Over-processed, over-cooked and over-compensated with a hefty dose of salt – what is it with chicken dishes? These products all boast 2g salt in a single portion.**

**Indeed this Iceland Cantonese Chicken provides an incredible 5.8g salt. With only five small pieces of 'battered chicken' in the tray this meal appears to be meant for one. We hope that people who rely on ready meals have good life insurance!**



## Food gets personal

How can the food industry grow? There's a limit to the amount people can eat, so food companies must look to new ways to make more money. Nutrigenomics, 'personalised nutrition', is touted as the way forward.

Genetic scientists claim that they will be able to analyse an individual's genetic material (DNA), then pinpoint the precise nutrition plan for optimal health.

Dr Ben van Ommen of the Centre for Human Nutrigenomics, NuGO, explains: 'The long-term goal is to provide everyone with scientifically sound information on what they should eat so as to maintain or improve their health and prevent diseases associated with ageing.' His centre has been awarded 17.3m Euros (approx £12 million) to drive forward this area of research.

Is this type of work likely to alleviate diet-related disease in Europe? Will expensive genetically analysed personalised diets help the poorest people, most likely to get diet-related disease? Will such publicly funded research programmes avoid focusing on economic growth for the food sector, and avoid helping only affluent people who probably eat pretty well already?

A new report from GeneWatch UK suggests not. Entitled *Your diet tailored to your genes: Preventing diseases or misleading marketing?*, it is a far-reaching review of the science, economics and politics of nutrigenomics.

The report's conclusion is compelling: 'The food and biotechnology industries, and many of the scientists they fund, have widely promoted the idea that the ultimate goal of nutritional research should be 'personalised nutrition', involving individual diets based on a person's genes and, perhaps in the longer term, on other biological measurements and continual monitoring. However, the scientific evidence does not support the conclusion that such an approach will benefit health. For most diet-related diseases in most people, the key to prevention lies not in individual biological differences but in tackling the 'politics of food' and issues such as food industry marketing practices, socio-economic deprivation, health inequalities, transport and the lack of sports facilities in schools.'

How else could £12m of public money be spent, rather than expensive research to help the wealthy few? Training for caterers? Seed grants for co-ops to supply schools with fresh food?

The European research agenda seems every bit as skewed as European diets.

■ See: [www.genewatch.org/HumanGen/GenesAndHealth.htm](http://www.genewatch.org/HumanGen/GenesAndHealth.htm)

**Your Diet Tailored To Your Genes:**

Preventing Diseases or Misleading Marketing?

A report by GeneWatch UK

**The FSA's current guidelines specify that foods should be considered high, medium or low in salt according to the following:**

	Salt / 100g	Sodium / 100g
High	1.25g or more	0.5g or more
Medium	Between 0.25 and 1.25g	Between 0.1 and 0.5g
Low	0.25g or less	0.1g or less

**Population-based recommended daily intake is no more than:**

Babies	1g salt a day (0.4g sodium)
1 to 3 years	2g salt a day (0.8g sodium)
4 to 6 years	3g salt a day (1.2g sodium)
7 to 10 years	5g salt a day (2g sodium)
11 and over	6g salt a day (2.4g sodium)

Even the 6g target is above what adults actually need: 95% of the adult population need less than 4g salt (1.6g sodium) for normal biological functioning. The minimum recommended daily intake is 1.5g salt (0.6g sodium) which is considered sufficient for only 5% of the adult population.

# Sausages and soap face ethical boycott

Committed Nestlé boycotters have been struggling in recent months with the ethical conundrum of whether to continue buying cosmetics and toiletries at the Body Shop, after it was bought out in March by L'Oréal, of which Nestlé owns a significant share. This followed the knotty problem of whether or not to buy certified Fairtrade Nestlé coffee whilst questions remain about the trading practices for the rest of Nestlé's coffee operations.

Does a buy-out or certification mark signify an encouraging move towards ethical practices? Or is it simply feel-good window dressing and an attempt to cash in on the lucrative niche ethical market, with no behind-the-scenes strategy to overhaul the fundamental ethics of the business?

The questions remain unanswered, and Nestlé remains the target of a long-running boycott for continuing to flout international baby formula milk marketing rules. Demonstrations have been organised outside Body Shop outlets around the UK. As Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop who sold her shares to Nestlé, stated in a letter to the Nestlé Boycott campaign coordinators, *'If you have to bloody boycott – then boycott. Boycott all the products that Nestlé own 100%... But for goodness' sake strengthen the arm of anyone who sees an opportunity of changing the black hole of the corporate world.'*

Even if their ethical strategy is ambiguous, Nestlé's acquisitions strategy is all too clear. In

May, rumours spread that the vegetarian food company Tivall looks set to purchase Linda McCartney Foods. Whilst the business website just-food.com reports that neither Tivall nor Linda McCartney Foods would confirm or deny the rumour, one fact did emerge; that Nestlé owns 50.1% of Tivall. Could we see a boycott of Linda McCartney sausages? Whatever next?!

We thought that a little ethical clarity might be needed, and spoke to colleagues and advisors of the *Food Magazine*. Whilst acknowledging that Nestlé's forays into ethical businesses might seem encouraging, and even signify a step in the right direction by the food giant, most of the people we spoke to fell on the 'window dressing' side of the argument. Without Nestlé having made a publicly stated aspiration to achieving 100% ethical and sustainable products and practices, consumers should continue to press hard for more fundamental reform. Targets and timetables for achieving these ambitious aims would also go a long way to reassuring consumers that the leopard really has changed its spots.

And of course, complete compliance with the International Code of Marketing would be a foundation stone for any return to favour.

As a reminder to Nestlé of some of the prerequisite ethical principles they would need to sign up to, to build permanent consumer confidence in the company's ethical stance, we reproduce the Nestlé Boycott campaign's 4-point plan below.

## Under-5s to get better nutrition

The Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA) has launched a nutritional training scheme for early years practitioners to help them plan menus and promote healthy eating for young children – the first of its kind in the UK.

The PLA is working with the children's cookery writer Annabel Karmel to produce recipes for parents and a cook-book for childcare practitioners, to be published in the autumn.

*Nutritional Guidance for Early Years* is also the subject of a new publication from the Scottish Executive, providing healthy eating advice for children aged one to five and 10-day menu plans for meals and snacks.

Meanwhile, the National Day Nurseries Association has joined forces with the Stop the Rot dental health campaign, urging the UK's 13,000 nurseries to sign up to three Smile Promises – sack the sugar; beat the sweets; and eat, drink and brush.

■ **Scottish Executive guidance is at: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent)**

■ **The 'Stop the Rot' campaign website is at: [www.stop-the-rot.co.uk](http://www.stop-the-rot.co.uk)**

## Veggies welcome definitions

The Vegetarian Society has welcomed moves to define the terms 'vegetarian' and 'vegan', to ensure that food manufacturers really mean what they say. The Food Standards Agency will champion the new definitions at an international level, in negotiations at Codex Alimentarius – the international standards-setting process that underpins world trade.

The Vegetarian Society has pointed out that there is a need for technical guidance in this area, as it has collected many reports of manufacturers wrongly claiming that non-vegetarian foods are vegetarian. A few recent examples include:

- A large supermarket's consumer magazine proudly promoting its new Tuna Niçoise Salad complete with the chain's own vegetarian (green 'v') logo.
- A jelly made with large amounts of gelatine (an animal-derived ingredient – usually made from the bones or skin of pigs or cows) clearly displaying the manufacturer's own 'suitable for vegetarians' logo.
- A large supermarket recently selling a noodle stir-fry dish in its produce section. The pack featured the supermarket's own 'suitable for vegetarians' logo but the accompanying sauce sachet contained fish.

The Vegetarian Society has urged the FSA to champion the vegetarians' cause in international negotiations over labelling and food standards.

■ **Further details of the Vegetarian Society's campaign activities can be found at: [www.vegsoc.org/political/](http://www.vegsoc.org/political/)**

### Baby Milk Action's four-point plan

1. Nestlé must state in writing that it accepts that the International Code and the subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions are minimum requirements for every country.

2. Nestlé must state in writing that it will make the required changes to bring its baby food marketing policy and practice into line with the International Code and Resolutions (i.e. end its strategy of denial and deception).

3. Baby Milk Action will take the statements to the International Nestlé Boycott Committee and suggest that representatives meet with Nestlé to discuss its timetable for making the required changes.

4. If the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) monitoring finds no Nestlé violations for 18 months, the boycott will be called off.

### Nestlé's response. The company:

1. Does not accept that the Code applies to all countries, only those on a list of its own invention and even then, Nestlé follows its own weaker Charter rather than the Code. Nestlé refuses to recognise that the subsequent Resolutions have equal status to the Code.

2. Continues to dispute any wrong-doing even when faced by documentary evidence of mal-practice, fines, convictions and rulings against it.

3. Has not provided the necessary statements.

4. Continues to violate the Code and Resolutions in a systematic manner.

■ **Campaign aims and Nestlé statements are reproduced from the Baby Milk Action website, [www.babymilkaction.org](http://www.babymilkaction.org), which reminds readers that every day, 4,000 babies die from unsafe bottle feeding.**

## Climate change: the risk of food poisoning

**Among the many problems that climate change may bring to the British Isles is a rise in the risk of food poisoning, especially during the winter months. Tim Lobstein reports**

**W**ith alarming regularity, the media tells us of the likely rise in temperatures we will face over the coming century if action is not taken to curb greenhouse gas emissions. In April, the government's Chief Scientific Officer Sir David King projected a likely rise in global temperature of at least 3°C. But what effect will this have on food safety?

Prevailing climate has a significant effect on the risk of getting food poisoning. Currently, the number of food poisoning cases increases in summer and decreases in winter, and there is a correlation between prevailing temperatures and reported food poisoning incidence.

A 1995 study by Bentham and Langford showed that above a threshold of around 7.5°C the rate of food poisoning rises strongly with the prevailing temperature (see ref 1 in box, right).

On this basis the authors estimated food poisoning incidence if global temperatures were to rise. On the basis of a 2°C rise, the figures suggest that food poisoning incidence could increase by as much as 20%.

In the UK the highest increase in incidence may occur for the period from autumn through to spring, when global warming will increasingly raise the prevailing temperature above the 7.5°C threshold (this is illustrated in the graph, based

on prevailing temperatures in East Kilbride, Scotland). If temperatures rise by 4°C then the figures for winter months leap again.

A contributing factor may be an increase in the fly and blowfly populations, which typically breed at temperatures above 10°C. Larvae can develop at temperatures as low as 3.5°C. The result of milder winters could mean greater problems of food contamination with insect-mediated enterobacteria and enteroviruses.

Day-night temperature changes may also be important. Milder night-time temperatures can increase the proliferation of micro-organisms in food left in ambient temperature, and increase the numbers of insects that transmit disease.

Warming seas may mean that some biotoxins associated with warmer weathers, such as the fish-borne toxin that causes Ciguatera sickness, may extend their range to higher latitudes, raising the risk of poisoning for people eating fish and shellfish.

There may also be an increase in the occurrence of toxic algal blooms which have complex relationships with human poisoning and are ecologically and economically damaging.

Increased humidity can encourage fungal growth, raising the risk of fungal-based contamination of food (e.g. with ochratoxin and aflatoxin).

Further, periods of drought encourage mice and rats to seek sources of food in human houses, which raises the risk of spreading rodent-borne diseases, as well as affecting food security.

Sir David King warned that 10% of the world's population face famine as climate change threatens agricultural production. But we must also face up to the fact that what food is available will increasingly be at risk of contamination.

### Where in the food chain does food poisoning occur?

The correlation between prevailing temperatures and reported food poisoning incidence is often interpreted as being a problem caused by neglectful consumers.

Local authorities and national agencies put out leaflets and advertising telling us all to be sure to keep chilled food in the fridge, to throw away out-of-date products, and to wash our hands. Messages are also sent to caterers reminding them of the need to monitor their food storage and food preparation activities, and to refresh their hygiene training.

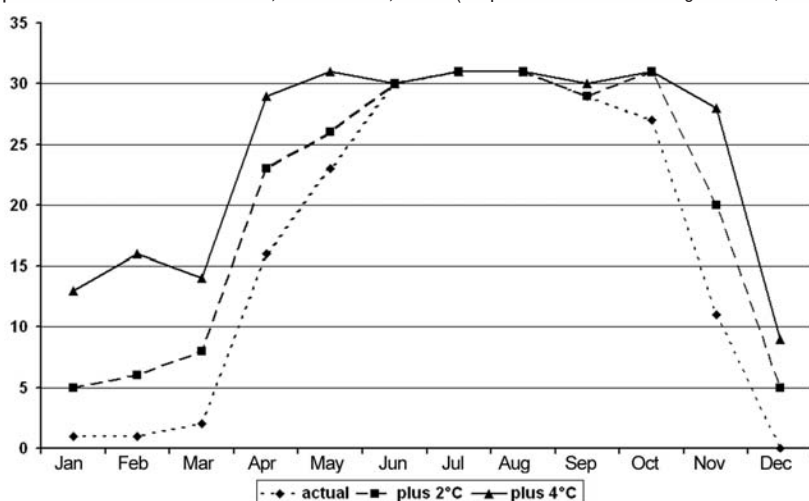
However, Bentham and Langford's research found that the incidence of food poisoning was most strongly associated with the temperature prevailing during the month prior to the month when the food poisoning outbreak occurred.<sup>1</sup> Temperatures in the earlier month accounted for more of the variation in food poisoning incidence and implied that conditions earlier in the food production process posed a more significant food poisoning risk than those just prior to consumption.

The authors suggest that attention should be paid to problems occurring early in the food chain, such as the condition of animals prior to slaughter and the likelihood that they may be harbouring infection. Such infection may be associated with contaminated feedstocks, water or other inputs. Contamination levels may be higher, or the disease spread more rapidly through herds and flocks, during warmer months.

Bacteria may also survive for longer in warmer conditions through the transport, slaughter and cutting processes. The authors therefore suggest that slaughterhouse procedures should also be improved, a finding echoed in several investigations into the causes of recent food poisoning outbreaks.<sup>2,3</sup>

#### Number of days each month in which mean daily temperature rises above 7.5°C

Temperature data for East Kilbride, Lanarkshire, 1995 (adapted from UK Meteorological Office, 2001)



1. Bentham G and Langford A H, Climate change and the incidence of food poisoning in England and Wales, *Int J Biometeorol*, 39, 81-86, 1995.

2. House of Commons, *Salmonella in eggs: First report*, House of Commons Agriculture Committee, February and December, HMSO, London 1989.

3. Pennington H, *Report on the circumstances leading to the 1996 outbreak of infection with E.coli O157 in Central Scotland, the implications for food safety and the lessons to be learned*, The Scottish Office, Edinburgh, 1997.



## Methyl bromide passes its sell-by date

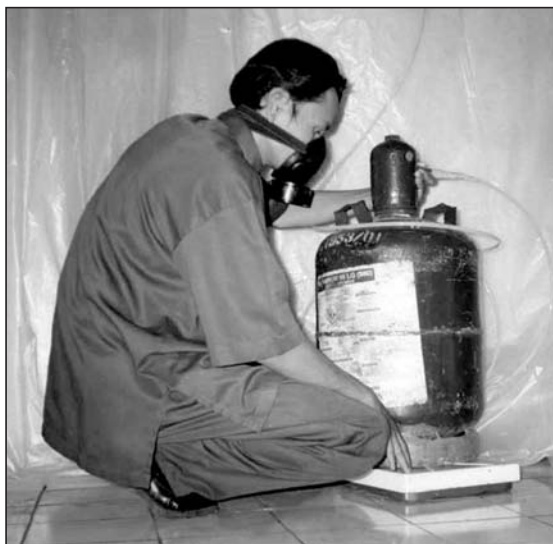
More than 5,000 farms and organisations joined forces with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in April to reinvigorate the phase-out of an agricultural fumigant that damages the ozone layer. Two UK supermarket chains were specifically highlighted in the UNEP publicity for taking a lead role – Marks & Spencer and the Co-op.

Methyl bromide is a toxic gas and pesticide, used since the 1940s to kill insects and rodents in some mills and food factories. It is also used to kill a wide spectrum of pests in soil before farmers plant out strawberries or other high-value crops prone to pest damage.

When the ozone layer thins, living systems are increasingly exposed to damaging ultraviolet radiation. Scientists have noted the rapid rise in incidence of skin cancer in Europe. Cancers related to sun and ultraviolet exposure are predicted to double in parts of northern Europe by 2015 – partly due to sunbathing habits, and partly due to a thinner ozone layer. Higher ultraviolet exposure (UV-B) also disrupts the timing and growth of certain types of crops and forest trees, and can reduce fish stocks.

As well as methyl bromide, ozone-damaging chemicals also include CFCs (used in older fridges and air-conditioning) and halons (used in fire extinguishers).

Methyl bromide was added to the official international list of ozone-damaging chemicals in 1992 and subsequently all governments agreed to phase it out, under an agreement called the Montreal Protocol. All industrialised countries, including the UK, were scheduled to phase out methyl bromide by January 2005.



**Continued application worldwide: An operator from an Indonesian pest-control company prepares to fumigate with the ozone-damaging pesticide methyl bromide. According to the company website, clients include hotels, supermarkets and food manufacturers.**

By 2003 about 56 countries that had previously used methyl bromide in the past no longer used it, and others appeared to be well on track to meet the scheduled phase-out date. Use of methyl bromide reduced from over 56,000 tonnes in 1991 to about 14,500 tonnes in 2003 in industrialised countries (a 74% reduction). The UK reduced consumption from about 630 tonnes in 1991 to about 167 tonnes in 2003 (73% reduction). Former methyl bromide users have adopted other successful pest control methods.

However, some mills, food companies and farmers in Europe and the US did not want to stop using methyl bromide. Manufacturers and food industry/agriculture groups claimed that no technically and economically feasible substitutes were available, despite growing evidence of the negative impact of the chemical's use on human health were emerging. As a result some exemptions were granted by governments. In the UK in 2006, Methyl Bromide is still permitted for:

- Some treatment of buildings – mills (e.g. flour mills), food processing factories (producing products such as biscuits, cereals, snack foods, spice ingredients) and cheese stores;
- Some treatment of food items such as nuts, dried fruit, herbs, spices and rice;
- Some soil treatments for strawberries, raspberries and ornamental tree nurseries.

The Association of Cereal Food Manufacturers and other food companies have applied to extend exemptions in future years. Methyl bromide users claim that their own individual use is so small that it cannot do any significant harm the earth's protective shield, neglecting to take into account the cumulative environmental effect.

The farms and companies that have joined UNEP's partnership have already stopped using methyl bromide or will pledge to halt its use by September 2007. As noted above, the partnership includes two UK supermarkets – Marks & Spencer and the Co-op – but has yet to attract support from the likes of Tesco, Sainsbury's or Asda.

Although the quantity of methyl bromide detected in the atmosphere has fallen significantly since 1998, UNEP says that *'scientists have warned against complacency – many small, remaining uses of methyl bromide risk negating the gains achieved to date'*. UNEP also warns that *'the ozone layer will not recover if the Montreal Protocol phase-out commitments are not implemented in full'*.

The reality is that many small uses add up to a big problem for the ozone layer – and that could lead to a very big problem for all of us.

## Government challenged to ban 'neurotoxic' additives

The Soil Association has called for several common food additives to be banned, following publication of a three-year study of synergistic effects of certain additives consumed in combination. We reported on a draft of the study in the previous edition of the *Food Magazine*.

The study, conducted at the University of Liverpool, shows that when the nerve cells were exposed to MSG (E621, a flavour enhancer) with Brilliant Blue (E133, an azo-dye colouring) or Aspartame (E951, an artificial sweetener, see pages 8 and 9) with Quinoline Yellow (E104, another azo-dye colouring), the additives stopped the nerve cells from normal growth and interfered with proper signalling systems.

Aspartame is one of the commonest artificial sweeteners, used in an estimated 6,000 food products, and widely used in pharmaceuticals.

Soil Association Policy Director Peter Melchett joined the sponsor of the study, Lizzie Vann from Organix Brands, delivering a challenge to Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt. They called on government to ban the suspect additives from all food. These additives are already prohibited in organic food and drink products.

**Peter Melchett (Soil Association) and Lizzie Vann (Organix Brands) deliver a challenge on 'neurotoxic' additives to the Department of Health**



## Tesco redefines seasonality

To help prevent unnecessary use of transport fuel and electricity for heated greenhouses, we are all urged to choose more local and seasonal food. Great advice, but what does 'seasonal' really mean? Don't take the lead from Tesco – one of its latest own-brand products to be described as 'seasonal' is long-life muffins with vaguely strawberryish pieces, bought by one of our *Food Magazine* researchers in a Tesco Metro during March. Strawberries are not in season in the UK at this time, unless they are grown in energy-intensive greenhouses or poly-tunnels.

And can anyone tell us what is the growing season for long shelf-life muffins?



# Aspartame: the litmus the FSA and EFSA



**Erik Millstone, Professor of Science Policy at the University of Sussex, warns that recent**

**research into the artificial sweetener aspartame is being ignored by food regulators.**

**A**spartame (often called by its brand name Nutrasweet) has not only been one of the most controversial food additives in the history of the industry, it has also been one of the most profitable. In autumn 2005 the controversy intensified with the publication of the results of a long-term feeding study of aspartame conducted by the Ramazzini Foundation in Italy, indicating that aspartame caused a dose-related and statistically significant increase in the incidence of several types of tumour.<sup>1</sup> The significance of these results can only be appreciated if they are seen against the bizarre context of the aspartame saga.

In the early 1970s, when the company seeking to market aspartame (G D Searle – and its subcontractor) was testing it for safety and/or toxicity, serious failings occurred in the conduct of those tests. There is, for example, evidence of rats dying during the course of the experiment, but instead of being dissected in a search for evidence that the test compound might have been responsible, they were discarded and replaced with other rats. The test material was not accurately characterised, and was not always properly mixed with the feed, so that some of the animals ate the basic diet but avoided the lumps of test compound. Serious shortcomings occurred in all 15 of the pivotal chronic (i.e. long-term) toxicology studies. Instead of acknowledging the mistakes and starting again, Searle submitted the data from the flawed studies. The errors were revealed by the diligent efforts of an heroic scientist, Adrian Gross at the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

So much of Searle's scientific evidence was flawed, including that on two drug products

Flagyl and Aldactone, that the Chief Lawyer at the Food and Drug Administration wrote in April 1976 to the Federal Attorney (FA) in Chicago (Searle's HQ was in Illinois) instructing him to convene a Grand Jury to indict, then prosecute Searle. Shortly thereafter, the Chicago FA was invited to join the law firm Sidley & Austin that represented Searle. He accepted and the Searle legal process was suspended until a new FA came into post. He too was invited to join Sidley & Austin, and the process was delayed again. This continued until the Statute of Limitations expired, so no effective legal action was taken.

Public pressure from scientists and campaigners forced the FDA to experiment with what was called a Public Board of Inquiry (PBoI) to adjudicate on at least some of the facts concerning the possibility that aspartame might cause brain cancer. The inquiry concluded in 1980 that it was not satisfied that aspartame was acceptably safe, and that judgement was endorsed by at least five senior FDA toxicologists. Despite this, aspartame was licensed in the US by the new head of the FDA, under the incoming Reagan Administration, who shortly thereafter left the FDA and went to work for Nutrasweet's PR company. The sweetener was approved in the UK on the advice of the Committee on Toxicity, whose chairman had his laboratory indirectly funded by Searle, and was approved in Europe and by the World Health Organisation with the involvement of scientists with undeclared commercial links to Nutrasweet.

After products containing aspartame reached the market, some consumers began reporting that they felt acute adverse effects. No-one knows the frequency with which such problems occur, but I estimate between 1% and 10% of consumers experience some adverse effects after ingesting aspartame. The most common symptoms are severe headaches and blurred vision, while, thankfully, epileptic-type seizures are rare. That evidence has repeatedly been dismissed officially as 'anecdotal', although the sufferers often report that occasionally symptoms recur. And when they do, they discover that inadvertently they had consumed aspartame.

In 1996 John Olney of Washington University St Louis, a noble veteran of the aspartame debate, published a paper reporting evidence that the introduction of aspartame had been responsible for an abrupt increase in the incidence of a particularly aggressive type of

brain tumour, called glioblastomas, in the US.<sup>2</sup> His argument was reinforced by evidence that the tumour type had also been conspicuous in one of the previous, though flawed, animal studies and by biochemical evidence indicating a mechanism through which aspartame could exert a carcinogenic effect. Predictably, the FDA and the US food industry discounted his analysis. In the UK and Europe it was officially discounted because similar patterns had not emerged in the data, but that is probably because the age-profile of people consuming artificially sweetened products differs between the US and this side of the Atlantic. In the UK and continental Europe, artificially sweetened products are predominantly consumed by younger people rather than by 'senior citizens', and it was the latter group that Olney argued were especially at risk.

I and others have repeatedly called for a repetition of the pivotal chronic toxicity tests on aspartame by independent scientists. Morando Soffritti and his colleagues at the Ramazzini Foundation in Italy have not just repeated the flawed tests, using the protocol preferred by the chemical industry. They have substantially improved upon it. The Italian study, published in 2005, did not use 400 rats, they used 900. Instead of testing the compound at three dose levels (plus a control group) they tested it at five dose levels (plus controls). Instead of killing the rats before they reached the ends of their average natural lives, the rats lived longer so that long-term effects could be studied. In these and many other ways, the Ramazzini study was more thorough, sensitive, reliable and relevant to human exposure than those conducted in accordance with conventional protocols.

The safety of aspartame is officially 'under review'. Provisional comments from the Food Standards Agency (FSA), its Committee on Carcinogenicity and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) have emphasised possible reasons for discounting the results of the Ramazzini study, which had indicated that aspartame causes statistically significant increases in the incidence of several types of cancers, as if they were a 'false positive', while they remained blind to the evidence that all the previous studies on which they have been relying are almost certainly false negatives. Aspartame represents a powerful litmus test for both the FSA and for the EFSA, but current indications



# test for

# School Food Trust permits sweeteners in milk drinks

suggest that they are likely to fail the test. Both the FSA and EFSA were created to end the subordination of food safety policy-making to industrial and commercial concerns, and instead to put consumers first and to do so in a transparent and accountable fashion. In the meantime, the chair of EFSA's expert advisory committee is a paid consultant to the International Life Sciences Institute, which is a pseudo-scientific front organisation for the major food and chemical companies. If, despite the evidence from Soffritti *et al*, and all the earlier evidence of the inadequacies of all the previous studies, aspartame remains on the market, consumers will know that the FSA and EFSA are failures and that more radical reforms will be necessary.

- 1 M Soffritti *et al*, 'Aspartame induces lymphomas and leukaemias in rats', *European Journal of Oncology*, vol. 10, No 2, pp. 107-116, 2005 [www.ramazzini.it/fondazione/docs/AspartameGEO2005.pdf](http://www.ramazzini.it/fondazione/docs/AspartameGEO2005.pdf); M Soffritti *et al*, 'First experimental demonstration of the multipotential carcinogenic effects of aspartame administered in the feed to Sprague-Dawley rats' *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 2005, Vol. 114, No. 3, March 2006 pp. 379-385 available at [www.ehponline.org/docs/2006/114-3/toc.html](http://www.ehponline.org/docs/2006/114-3/toc.html)
- 2 Olney J. W. *et al*, 'Increasing brain tumor rates: is there a link to aspartame?', *Journal of Neuropathology and Experimental Neurology*, Vol. 55, No 11, November 1996

## Latest news on aspartame

On 5 May 2006, EFSA announced the findings of its review of the Ramazzini cancer study, concluding it considers aspartame to be 'safe'.

EFSA acknowledged improvements in design of the scientific study. However, it questioned the link between a slight increase in incidence of cancers (lymphomas and leukemias) in treated rats, saying that they felt this was attributable to a high background incidence of inflammatory changes in the lung in both treated and untreated rats, and associated with high doses of a number of different types of chemicals tested on animals.

However, as Erik Millstone points out, an anomaly remains that rats fed no aspartame did suffer with lung inflammations, but they did not get cancer. EFSA did not address this point.

**For EFSA's response, visit: [www.efsa.eu.int/press\\_room/media\\_events/1460\\_en.html](http://www.efsa.eu.int/press_room/media_events/1460_en.html)**

**T**o-and-fro debates about government plans for school food have shown, once again, that independent scrutiny is crucial so that industry influence will not win the day.

In March, the School Food Trust, set up by the Department for Education and Skills, published its long-awaited recommendations to government for nutritional standards for two aspects of school food other than lunch. These cover mid-morning break services, breakfast and after-school meals, tuck shops and the thorny question of vending machines.

The Trust's advice is that the following mandatory standards should apply to all food sold in schools throughout the day:

- No confectionery should be sold in schools;
- No bagged savoury snacks other than nuts and seeds (without added salt or sugar) should be sold in schools;
- A variety of fruit and vegetables should be available in all school food outlets, including fresh, dried, frozen, canned and juiced;
- Pupils must have easy access at all times to free, fresh, preferably chilled, water in schools so that children do not have to depend on going to the toilets for tap water;
- The only other drinks available should be bottled water (still or sparkling), skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, pure fruit juices, yogurt and milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar), drinks made from combinations of these (e.g. smoothies), low-calorie hot chocolate, tea and coffee. Artificial sweeteners could be used in yogurt and milk drinks;
- Every school should have a whole school food and nutrition policy, preferably reflected in its single School Plan.

The standards, which the School Food Trust believes that all schools should be achieving by early 2007, have been broadly welcomed by health campaigners, especially the ban on junky snacks. Responses from health organisations generally echo the chair of the School Food Trust, Suzi Leather, who said: *'New food standards cannot succeed if pupils are surrounded with chocolate, crisps and drinks that fill them up with sugar and fat during the school day. It's not in children's best interests to have unlimited access to these products, and they replace the consumption of more nourishing foods.'*

However, the level of detailed scrutiny applied by health organisations and charities shows just how important these recommendations are for the future health and wellbeing of children. The Hyperactive Children's Support Group, for example, has been hot on the heels of the School Food Trust to ensure that 'low-calorie'

drinks should not be seen as an answer to obesity concerns at the expense of other possible health disbenefits to children from consuming artificial sweeteners. The support group encourages parents to exclude artificial sweeteners as part of a programme to improve children's well-being and behaviour. The HACSG has therefore expressed dismay that some artificially sweetened products will still be allowed.

Meanwhile, the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) kept up the pressure for environmental considerations to be built in. During the consultation process, they pointed out that free filtered tap water should be preferred to bottled water. It would be all too easy for schools to slip into the trap of relying on income from bottled water, excluding the poorer children and contributing to more packaging waste.

Whilst the NFWI's concerns over water are reflected in the final document, further points on local and seasonal fruit and vegetables were not considered. This is despite work from the government's own Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) who were keen to ensure the opportunity for major overhaul in the school food system should set school caterers on a path to sustainability as well as better nutrition. As they point out, food is responsible for around a third of our 'ecological footprint', and around 30% of greenhouse gas emissions. Such concerns were not considered to be within the remit of the School Food Trust, so caterers can look forward to yet more reviews when government finally starts to take food sustainability more seriously.

The proof of government resolve will now be in the support, funding and freedom that it gives to the implementation programme. There are already signs that restrictions on Lottery funds will mean that the School Food Trust will have less budget than originally planned. But money must be made available for training school staff to deliver on the fine words and principles. The 'proof of the pudding' will require an inspection system which, as the British Heart Foundation (among many others) points out, should be regulated by regular Ofsted inspections, with meaningful sanctions and subsequent support for schools who fail to meet the new standards.

■ **For details of the School Food Trust, see: [www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)**

■ **The SDC report on school food and sustainability is at: [www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/191205.html](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/191205.html)**

■ **See also: 'Soil Association calls for additive ban', page 7.**

# Legal, decent, honest and true?

**The activities of the advertising industry raise many important questions for nutrition and health. Here we report on activities and rulings of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in recent months.**

## X Bread riddle solved

Warburtons was criticised by the ASA for an ad headlined 'What's the healthiest packed lunch you've never made?' 'New Warburtons All-In-One Riddlers are bread rolls ready-filled with either cheese or ham flavour cheese spread. Kids love them, and so will you, as Riddlers provide wholemeal goodness in a white roll, and they supply over 28% of a child's RDA of calcium. A healthy lunch that kids love.' The complainant objected that the ad implied the product was a complete healthy lunch.

Whilst the ASA accepted the manufacturer's plea that that they had not intended to imply the product provided a healthy lunch on its own, but that it could form part of an overall healthy lunch, the complaint was upheld.

## X FSA censured on salt

Unusually, the ASA ruled on a public health advertisement. The Food Standards Agency had issued the ad as part of its reduce salt campaign. The ASA criticised the FSA for exaggerating health benefits of cutting back on salt for a named family that featured in the advertisement. The complainant also said that the 'Ready Sorted!' ad misleadingly implied that most salt came from snacks, but the ASA did not uphold the complaint on this point.

## X Seductive ads rejected

Two advertisements for alcohol were deemed to link sexual pleasure and social success with alcohol – implications explicitly discouraged by the voluntary code of advertising practice. A cinema ad for the alcoholic drink Disaronno was deemed to be 'irresponsible' by the ASA because an image of a woman touching a barman's arm and placing an ice cube to her mouth 'conveyed seduction and strong sexual overtones'. First Drinks Brands were advised to adopt a different approach in future. Meanwhile, Young and Co's Brewery were censured for showing a ram (the brewery's symbol) dressed as a man and enjoying social success linked to alcohol consumption and being a likely 'target for seduction'. Young's was advised by the ASA to withdraw the posters.

## ✓ Organics defended

Several aspects of a complaint against an organic juice manufacturer were rejected by the ASA. A rival fruit grower and the Crop Protection Association (pesticide trade body) objected to an ad from The Organic Juice Co that spoke of the risk of consuming 'a cocktail of chemical pesticide residues' in conventionally produced fruit products. Although the pesticide trade body felt this portrayed pesticide-treated fruit 'in a negative light', the ASA ruled against the The Organic Juice Co only for appearing to imply that pesticide-free food might taste different.

## X Welfare rules not practical?

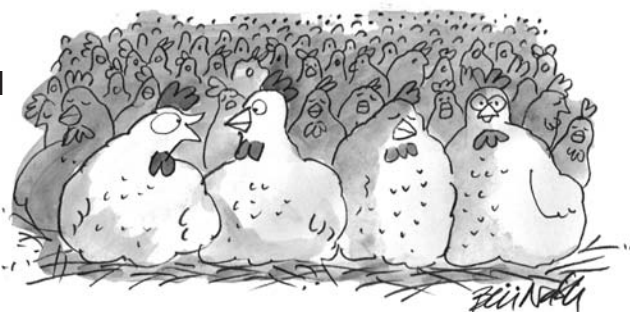
The British Pig Executive (BPEX) objected to a trade magazine ad for a food company Vion. The text of the advertisement stated that 'We consider it our duty to use only meat from healthy animals treated according to the latest animal welfare regulations and therefore ensure the highest quality along the entire supply chain.'

BPEX, who believed only 21% of pig meat imported from the Netherlands complied with animal welfare regulations equivalent to those in

the UK, objected that the advert implied that all the pigmeat Vion imported conformed to UK animal welfare regulations. Vion argued that it was not practical for a meat processor to adhere to the standards in each individual European country because they differed so much. However, the complaint was upheld.

## ✓ Chickens do suffer

'Millions of chickens suffer terribly before being slaughtered' was the claim that drew a complaint regarding a London Underground poster published by the campaign group People for the Ethical Treatment of



*"What a relief to hear that the ASA is 'satisfied' that our suffering exists!"*

Animals (PETA). The group said that 800 million chickens were raised and slaughtered each year in the UK, with a number of studies documenting ill treatment during the farming, transportation and slaughter of chickens. A study by Compassion in World Farming showed that nine out of 100 chickens slaughtered were conscious during the process, totally some 7.2 million birds annually in the UK. The ASA said it was 'satisfied that the evidence indicated that welfare issues that affected the suffering of millions of broiler chickens existed' and dismissed the complaint.

■ **An analysis of complaints and ASA rulings regarding food advertisements that have compared processed food products to fruit are shown on the following page.**

## ASA ignores the weight of public concern

Of the adverts that attract public concern, most attract only one or two complaints. However, the ASA has revealed that one advertisement provoked a record-breaking 1,671 complaints in 2005 – an ad featuring call-centre workers singing with their mouths full of KFC fried chicken. Most complainants objected to the ad because they said it encouraged bad manners in children. The case is especially interesting as it neatly illustrates the ASA's apparent two-fingered attitude to public concern. The ASA ruled against the record-breaking number of public complaints and defended KFC for showing disgusting behaviour.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, another food product that made it into the top 10 for 'most complained about advertisements in 2005'.

Once again, an offensive advert, this time for Pot Noodle, attracted 620 complaints. But once again, despite public concern, the ASA failed to censure the advertisers.



# ASA fails to defend fruit

**Simply ticking off a few food companies isn't nearly enough to convince health campaigners that the ASA is a champion of good nutrition, argues Kath Dalmeny.**

**W**hen Advertising Standards Authority rulings are published, the worst that most companies face is a bit of bad publicity. The ASA likes to give the appearance of a public body that champions the consumer cause. But when it comes to food advertising, the ASA does little to defend sound and simple nutritional advice – especially advice associated with non-branded foods such as fruit and veg.

Diets high in fruit and veg are associated with lower rates of cancer, heart disease and other conditions such as asthma. Yet food companies persist in advertising products of questionable nutritional value by associating their brands with the health qualities of fresh produce, or by denigrating fruit and veg in favour of their own products. Fresh produce is a 'safe target', there being no coordinating body to defend fruit and vegetables from unfair competitive practice.

In the past few months, two ASA rulings have underlined the Authority's reluctance to champion public health messages, in marked contrast to their more proactive stance in earlier years. In March, the ASA rejected a complaint about a cinema advert portraying Jammie Dodger biscuits releasing a child from having to eat

brussel sprouts. The implication was that jammy biscuits are associated with a cheeky break from parental pressure to eat healthy foods.

Earlier this year, the ASA also ruled against a complaint from the Food Commission about an ad stating that two slices of Kingsmill Wonder White bread had twice the fibre of a banana. We believed it was unhelpful for a bread company to imply that eating white bread offered greater health benefits than eating fruit. The ASA did not agree, and rejected the complaint.

It might seem like sour grapes on our part (if you'll pardon the pun) to be concerned about such rulings, were it not that they seem to mark a move in favour of processed foods. A few examples from our archive of a more pro-nutrition stance illustrate the point.

## Panda Pops compared to orange juice

In March 2005, the ASA upheld a complaint from the Food Commission against a leaflet for Panda Pops. A table compared the children's drinks to pure orange juice on the basis of sugar content. The ASA ruling stated: *'The drinks in the Popzone range contained less sugar than unsweetened orange juice.'* The ASA expressed concern that the statement *'Many parents choose fruit juice as a 'healthier' option for their kids, when it actually contains the same level of acid and twice*



the amount of sugar as a bottle of Panda Pops' implied misleadingly that Panda Pops were healthier than orange juice. The ASA told the advertiser to amend the copy.

## Volvic flavoured water compared to apples

In 2001, the ASA upheld a complaint from the Food Commission against Danone Waters for an advertisement claiming for Volvic 'Touch of Fruit' bottled water that *'A 33cl bottle contains 15% fewer calories than an average apple'*. The same claim appeared on thousands of Volvic bottles. The ASA ruled that the claim was misleading.

## Tetley antioxidants compared to fruit and veg

In October 2002, the ASA upheld a complaint from the Food Commission against Tetley Tea, for claims that antioxidants in tea could help prevent coronary heart disease and extend life. On labels Tetley linked these claims to the health benefits of eating fruit and vegetables, almost as if antioxidants in fruit and vegetables were their primary or sole beneficial component. At the time, the Tetley website also stated *'Tetley Tea - rich in antioxidants! Remember that Tetley Teas are high in antioxidants - compounds that can help your body fight against heart disease, cancer, and various other conditions associated with ageing. Have a cuppa to help you stay healthy!'* The ASA ruled that Tetley's claims were based on shaky evidence and should be withdrawn.

We urge the ASA to defend fruit and vegetables from denigration and unfair competitive marketing practices by means of disadvantageous comparative claims, and help to reserve health claims for foods and drinks that are genuinely healthy.

**Panda Pops (left) implied its products were healthier than orange juice**



**Masterfoods (Mars) imagery links chocolate to healthy fruit on its Cocopro website.**

complaints to a trading standards department and to the Joint Health

Claims Initiative resulted in little more than an exchange of letters. The product was renamed Cocoa Via, and health claims continue to be made at: [www.cocoavia.com](http://www.cocoavia.com)

Masterfoods is also responsible for the Cocopro website where images of chocolate and fruit are almost interchangeable. See: [www.cocopro.com/resource\\_cntr/index.jsp](http://www.cocopro.com/resource_cntr/index.jsp)

## Press releases and websites get round the rules

Other companies have tried the same game, but have escaped censure from the ASA because the medium in which their claims were published is not covered by the ASA.

In August 2004, a press release from the PR company Hill & Knowlton compared the sugar content of Frosties Reduced Sugar cereal to that of bananas – showing Frosties in a favourable light. Since the ASA refuses to adjudicate on press releases, we were not able to submit a formal complaint about this comparison, despite the fact that it was subsequently reproduced in several national newspapers. We pointed out to the PR company that sound

health advice seeks to limit people's consumption of *extrinsic* sugars such as those in frosted cereal – which are sugars released from the cell. Sugars in fruit are *intrinsic* sugars, so it was not an appropriate comparison. Hill & Knowlton did not reply.

Masterfoods (Mars) has long wanted a piece of the action with regards claimed antioxidant health benefits of its chocolate products. In 2003, Masterfoods compared its Positively Healthy Cocoa to the 'antioxidant power' of half a kilo of blueberries; 450g of red grapes; 400g of apples; or 400g of onions. The ASA does not rule on food labelling or websites. Our



# Advertising regulator cave



**It has taken over two years for Ofcom to suggest how it might regulate junk food**

**ads aimed at children. Quite frankly, it wasn't worth the wait, says Richard Watts of the Children's Food Bill campaign.**

**B**ack in 2003 concerns were mounting over food quality and childhood obesity, and an extensive House of Commons select committee enquiry on obesity concluded that junk food marketing should be controlled to prevent chronic diet-related diseases. The Food Commission's Parents Jury had made its mark, spotlighting unhealthy children's food products and marketing practices. The Government bowed to public pressure and asked the communication regulator Ofcom to look at options to restrict junk food advertising aimed at children.

A mere two and a half years later, and Ofcom has finally published its consultation document. It wasn't worth the wait.

Ofcom has suggested four options to protect children from junk food TV adverts but have completely ruled out the one option that all health, consumer and food groups have called for in one of the most coordinated and far-reaching public campaign coalitions in decades. What over 100 national health organisations agreed upon was that the regulator should protect children from junk food ads right up to

the 9pm watershed. This option would, the coalition argue, significantly reduce children's exposure to junk food adverts and allow concerned parents to exercise responsibility over whether their children see such ads at all. Yet the option has not even been put forward by Ofcom for public consideration. This is choice editing at its most extreme. Instead, Ofcom's options are:

(1) Junk food ads be limited during children's television and a few other times. For some reason, Ofcom has defined 'children' for this purpose as aged four to nine. See the box on the right for how the *Food Magazine* reacts to this proposal. Given that the commercial TV programmes most watched by children (aged up to 16) are in the key early evening slot (such as *Coronation Street* and *The Bill*) this is likely simply to cause a shift in the way junk foods are advertised, with advertisements moving from 5pm to 7.30pm.

(2) Ofcom's second option rather bizarrely proposes the same regulation on the timing of adverts as above but for healthy food as well as junk food. When pushed, Ofcom has admitted that they included this option under pressure from the junk food industry who still refuse to admit there is such a thing as a 'good' or 'bad' food. One out, all out, the junk food manufacturers want us to say. Yet health organisations have always argued for healthy foods to be given the clear benefit of being able to be marketed to children, to help redress dietary balance. A balanced option is not on offer from Ofcom here.

(3) The third option also includes 'good' food advertising and suggests that food can only be advertised for set amounts of time every hour (e.g. for two minutes every hour). This option still allows junk food to be advertised during children's TV and will inevitably favour the largest food and

drink manufacturers who will be able to outbid smaller manufacturers for the limited advertising time available. As readers of the *Food Magazine* will know from long experience, the larger manufacturers do not necessarily produce the healthiest food and drink products for children!

(4) Ofcom's fourth option is, amazingly, an open invitation to industry to come up with their own package of measures.

Despite admitting that the health benefits flowing from a pre-watershed ban would save the nation up to four times the amount of money it would lose TV companies, Ofcom described this option as 'disproportionate'. Translating government-speak, this means that they think industry will lose out if stricter measures are implemented. In this case, introducing the notion of 'proportionality' means a trade-off between children's health and TV company profit.

Ofcom has also ruled out pre-watershed controls because it claims parents are against it. However even its own poll shows twice as many parents support this idea as oppose it.

Neither of Ofcom's reasons to rule out the pre-watershed ban hold water and yet the regulator has ruled out the only effective way of protecting children from junk food adverts. But maybe Ofcom aren't really an independent regulator at all. We placed a Freedom of Information request, which showed that Ofcom consulted industry groups 29 times when it drew-up its proposals, compared to just four meetings with health and consumer groups.

Until now, Ofcom's way of doing business has been to do cosy deals with broadcasters behind closed doors. This style of regulation means they are umbilically linked with industry. Health, food and consumer campaigners had to fight even to meet Ofcom in the first place and it is clear their views have been ignored as Ofcom formulated its proposals. For Ofcom, consultation is a sham.

Despite Ofcom's weak recommendations Sustain's Children's Food Bill will continue to campaign to ensure children are protected from junk food advertising.

With the recent announcement that one in three UK children is now obese or overweight there is still a very great deal at stake.

■ **Richard Watts is the new campaign coordinator for the Children's Food Bill. Contact: Sustain, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF; [www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk)**

■ **Charlie Powell, former Children's Food Bill campaign coordinator, has moved on to become a trade campaigner for Oxfam, and we wish him well in his new work.**

## Badvertisement Cupcakes? How refreshing!

At the Food Commission we have often pointed out that descriptions that imply 'fresh' or 'fruity' qualities should be treated with suspicion. Indeed, we have found in recent surveys that the word 'refreshing' applied to juice drinks should usually be taken to mean 'with lots of added water'. People need to learn a new language to understand food labels. In the case of these Refreshers cupcakes, 'refreshment' associated with sherbert sweets and a fizzing sensation. But the fruitiness? The different flavours of these gaudily coloured pink and yellow buns are



Lipsmacking Lemon and Rip-Roaring Raspberry. Inevitably, the ingredients list shows not a hint of fruitiness. Hydrogenated vegetable oil and several types of sugar do, however, put in star appearances.

# s in to industry

## WH Smith pushes calories on customers

### Ofcom redefines a 'child', but what do the experts say?

Ofcom made the bizarre decision to suggest that junk food ads might be regulated only for children under the age of nine. Why nine? It is apparently an age randomly picked out of the air, and hardly an effective basis for regulation.

We decided to consult with some experts; but who would know the appropriate age when young people can still be considered to be children and worthy of special protection?

We called Great Ormond Street children's hospital. They treat children up to the age of 16. In scientific research programmes on data from child subjects, they often use data from young people up to 18 years old. Unlike Ofcom, they recognise that young people's bodies and minds are still growing and need special care.

Similarly, special protection is afforded to young people through the NHS, which offers certain free medical, health and advice services to children up to the age of 16.

We also looked at what the government thinks of as a 'child' when it comes to making independent decisions about their money and future well-being. National Savings and Investments (NS&I) is the government-backed organisation providing tax-efficient financial products including Children Bonus Bonds – five-year fixed-rate bonds that can be taken out by adults on behalf of children up to the age of

16. Unlike Ofcom, NS&I seems to think that young people need special guidance and controls to help them make the best decisions for their future well-being.

When it comes to smoking, the government is all too clear. Under 16s are children, and they cannot buy cigarettes. In April, Scottish ministers began to consider whether to raise the age limit to 18 to protect young people from adopting unhealthy habits. Note that they are not considering dropping the age limit to nine.

Who else could we ask? We racked our brains. Ah yes! Why not Ofcom itself? The Ofcom Broadcasting Code has a special chapter entitled 'Protecting the under-18s'. In the first section, Ofcom helpfully gives its meaning of the word children. Ofcom's definition is exactly as follows: 'Children are people under the age of fifteen years.'

It's plain that Ofcom cannot even follow its own advice, let alone the huge swell of public opinion that is set against its biased choice of options for protecting children from junk food marketing.

■ To see Ofcom's true definition of a child, visit: [www.ofcom.gov.uk/tv/ifi/codes/bcode/protectingu18/](http://www.ofcom.gov.uk/tv/ifi/codes/bcode/protectingu18/)

Earlier this year, WH Smith became the latest target for David Cameron MP, who slammed the newsagent for displays of snacks at the checkout as contributing to excessive calories.

The leader of the Tory party singled out the retail chain for promoting half-price chocolate oranges at its checkouts rather than real oranges, saying this was less than helpful in the face of an obesity crisis. He criticised marketing techniques pushing unhealthy snacks on customers.



A spokesperson for WH Smith responded by saying that some of its stores now sold bananas and apples, but oranges were not practical. 'Oranges are not that easy and our customers don't want them,' they added.

Over the past weeks our intrepid researchers have been out to see if WH Smith has continued their less-than-healthy

marketing practices, visiting several outlets in stations and high-streets around London.

When purchasing a newspaper, surveyors reported that the usual experience was that the cashier explicitly pointed out a special offer on large-sized bars of chocolate. On a couple of occasions, the product was prompted more than once, and the surveyor had to make a special effort to say no, they really couldn't stomach the product or the extra calories.

Two surveyor anecdotes are especially worth recounting. One surveyor said, 'As in other stores the half-price offer on large chocolate bars was pointed out. I explained that since I was buying a newspaper at a railway station, I was likely to be spending the next couple of hours sitting down in a train and not wearing off the calories. The cashier laughed and said, "Well, what do you want instead, a free GP with your newspaper?!"'

Another surveyor said, 'I was pleased to see a display of fruit by the counter. As usual, I was offered a half-price chocolate bar, so I asked if I could have a half-price apple instead (they were 49p each). The cashier seemed embarrassed when she told me they weren't on promotion. When I suggested they could be promoting the fruit rather than the chocolate, she told me a lot of other people had pointed this out.'

On no occasion were surveyors offered the opportunity to inform WH Smith head office they did not want to be prompted to eat extra calories.

■ Special thanks to reader Annie Oram for helping out with this survey.

### Campaign calls for public pressure on Ofcom

A new campaign leaflet from the Children's Food Bill campaign shows a child drip-fed on food advertising. The leaflet includes two tear-off campaign postcards – one to be sent to Lord Currie, Chair of Ofcom, expressing disappointment at Ofcom having caved in to industry pressure and coming up with 'weak proposals that will not protect children'.

The second postcard is for MPs, who can still bring pressure to bear on behalf of parents, to call for a ban on junk food advertising right up to the 9pm watershed.

To sign a petition, criticising Ofcom for having put the interests of junk food advertisers before the interests of child health, visit the website:

[www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk) or write directly to Lord Currie, Ofcom Chairman, Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA. To find out how to contact your MP, visit [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com) or write



to them by name at: House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

# Peanuts to Sainsbury's

Nuts are usually on the list of 'good' foods, and a portion can be counted towards your five-a-day fruit 'n' veg. Rich in protein, vitamins, minerals and fibre, they have only one drawback: they contain a lot of fat. The oils are generally good ones, but you get a hefty dose – about 50% by weight – which means their calorie-count tends to be high.

So when we saw that Sainsbury's were offering a peanut butter with 33% less fat, we thought we were onto a winner.

How have they done it? Did they use a centrifuge to spin some oil off the surface, perhaps, or did they use a solvent to remove oil from the raw peanuts?

We took a look at their regular peanut butter and their reduced fat version. We expected to find a hefty reduction in the calorie count if the fat had been cut, but we found the calories only 10% less – and then we twigged.

This wasn't peanut butter with some of the fat taken out. This was peanut butter with peanut butter taken out, and a dose of glucose syrup put in its place. Plus a pinch of soya protein and some maltodextrin. As a result, the sugar content climbs from under 4% in regular peanut butter to over 27% in this product.

We believe the '33% less fat' claim is highly misleading, given the extraordinary sugar levels that are there instead. The sweetest normal peanut butter we could find comes in at 10% sugar (see note on the right).

**Sainsbury's '33% less fat' Peanut Butter contains less fat because it contains less peanuts. Dollops of sugar (dried glucose syrup), soya protein and palm oil have been added, along with salt and maltodextrin – making this a highly adulterated product.**

Our copy of the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines peanut butter as 'a paste of ground, roasted peanuts'. With over 30% of the contents unrelated to peanuts, we believe that calling this product 'peanut butter' may also be a misleading description. The Food Safety Act 1990 prohibits the sale of any food *'that is not of the nature, substance or quality demanded by the purchaser'*; and makes it an offence to *'describe, present or advertise food in a way that is false or likely to mislead the consumer'*.

We would mount a legal challenge – but the cost would be more than... well... peanuts.

\* We looked at all of the peanut butters sold by Sainsbury's online. The product with 10% sugar is an American product with the brand name Skippy. Besides the sugar content, we were intrigued by Skippy's claim that it was 'made from 100% prime American peanuts' when it actually contains only 90% peanuts, plus the sugar and some partially hydrogenated oil. 'Made from 100%...' is an ambiguous phrase here, implying that the whole product is pure peanuts.



# 'Perfect' – but for whom?

So you have this choice, see, between two strawberry yogurts. One is 'Seriously Fruity', but the other is just as seriously 'Perfectly Balanced', so it must be better for you, right?

And while 'Seriously Fruity' costs you 35p 'Perfectly Balanced' costs 41p for the same size pot – a 17% premium.

Both products are low in fat, although 'Perfectly Balanced' is about 1 gram per pot lower. More concerning is that both of these yogurts provide a very unbalanced 21.5g of sugar in every pot – substantially more than the same volume of Coca-Cola or Pepsi and amounting to 30-40% of your recommended daily maximum.

Both yogurts contain added flavouring, modified maize starch and acidity regulators.

The biggest difference we could spot is that the cheaper 'Seriously Fruity' contains 20% more fruit, while the 'Perfectly Balanced' has two unique ingredients not found in the fruity one... added colouring and added water!

So it appears that 'Perfectly Balanced' means less fruit, added water and colour, a heap of sugar – and a premium price!

Article 2 of European Directive 2000/13/EC requires that the labelling, advertising and presentation of a food must not be such as could mislead a purchaser to a material degree, including suggesting the food possesses special characteristics when in fact all similar foods possess such characteristics.

Furthermore, four years ago the Food Standards Agency criticised companies who used empty marketing terms like 'fresh' and 'pure'. Similar complaints had been made by the government's Food Advisory Committee in the 1980s and 1990s.

Waitrose is deliberately sticking two fingers up at these recommendations with a meaningless and possibly misleading use of 'perfect' and 'balanced' – or else they have been very poorly advised by their nutritionists.



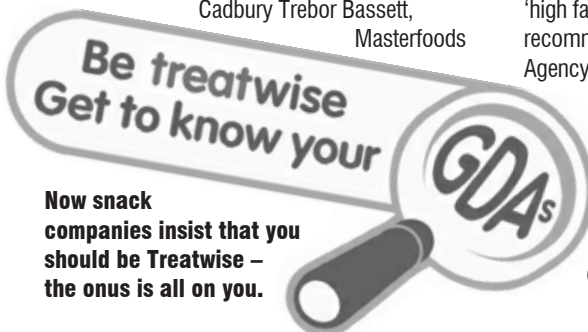
# Confectioners join forces to avoid a red light

Don't ever believe a food manufacturer if they tell you they can't fit vital information onto a food label due to lack of space. In their latest bid to avoid regulation, confectioners have found room for a brand new logo to tell you a snack's nutritional value in relation to Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs). The logo forms part of Treatwise, an initiative launched this February by Cadbury Trebor Bassett, Masterfoods

(Mars) and the UK confectionery trade body the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Association. It is described as *'a major consumer education initiative that will help people understand better how treats such as chocolates and sweets can be enjoyed as part of a balanced diet and lifestyle'*.

The logo deftly ignores the option to denote 'high fat' or 'high sugar' on products. This is the recommended approach in the Food Standards Agency traffic light scheme now being adopted by several supermarkets and manufacturers.

We were amused to see that the logo features a magnifying glass. Perhaps this will help consumers to find the saturated fat and sugar information per 100g, which is still missing from many confectionery labels.



**Now snack companies insist that you should be Treatwise – the onus is all on you.**



# Manipulated desire

Not so long ago, an American journalist with a long-standing interest in human behaviour wanted to find out what a curious-sounding body, the Institute of Motivational Research in up-state New York, was getting up to. He began collecting material published by this organisation and by other researchers into human motivations, and the results alarmed him.

The researchers, he found, were not just dispassionate scientists analysing our evolutionary and socially-determined motivations but were developing methods for applying their science to the *manipulation* of individuals' motivations, desires and behaviour. A technology for marketing was being developed, and there were no controls on its use. The journalist, named Vance Packard, compiled a manuscript containing his findings and submitted it for publication as a book fifty years ago this summer, in 1956.

The book, *The Hidden Persuaders*, became a best-seller in the US and was published in the UK by Penguin in 1957. The publishers described it as 'An introduction to the techniques of mass-persuasion through the unconscious' and the book emphasised the extent to which the efforts of advertisers and marketers 'take place beneath the level of awareness so that the appeals which move are, in a sense, "hidden"'.

From the outset, Packard was clear that the manipulation of desires and choices occurred through several strands simultaneously: product design, packaging, and display were as important as advertisements. The snap and crackle and pop of a cereal or the colour of a cherry-flavoured soda was as important in appealing to children's tastes as the cartoon characters on the package or the shape of the bottle, its display at child height on the shelf, or the offer of a free toy – and these acted in conjunction with TV commercials using bright colours,

movement, music, familiar characters and recognisable logos.

The leading users of this new technology made no secret of their intentions. Packard quotes the president of the Public Relations Society of America who said in a speech to his members *'The stuff with which we work is the fabric of men's minds'*.

Similarly, an advertising executive cited psychoanalytical research to explain why women would pay ten times as much for skin cream than for soap. Soap, he said, only promises to make them clean, whereas skin cream promises to make them beautiful. *'The women are buying a promise. Cosmetic manufacturers are not selling lanolin, they are selling hope... We no longer buy oranges, we buy vitality. We don't buy an auto (car), we buy prestige.'*

The need to manipulate people's motivation has been recognised by political and religious leaders for many millennia, but the past century has seen a specific application of the techniques of persuasion for commercial purposes. Packard recognised this, and noted that the commercial sector has 'more billions of dollars immediately at stake' and have poured resources into the marketing effort accordingly.

The development of the science of influencing choice recognises three fundamentals, said Packard. Firstly, people may not know what they want. They may tell pollsters and surveyors about their intentions, but these are not closely related to their actual behaviour. Secondly, people may not tell you the truth about their motivations even if they are aware of them. They will only tell you what they want you to know, or what they think you want to hear. Asking your customers what they want or like is, says one consultant, 'the least reliable index' for a manufacturer wanting to win new customers.

Lastly, people do not behave rationally. Tests in the 1950s by the Colour Research Institute asked housewives to test three new detergents, all of which were in fact identical in content and function. After the trial period the housewives reported that the detergent in a yellow box was considered too strong, and even ruined clothes, while that in a blue box was too weak and left the



*"It's not just a crisp, Sharon, it's alpha-male street cred!"*

clothes dirty. The most effective detergent, the users said, was in a mixed blue and yellow box. Men were just as irrational when it came to their views on the quality of cars.

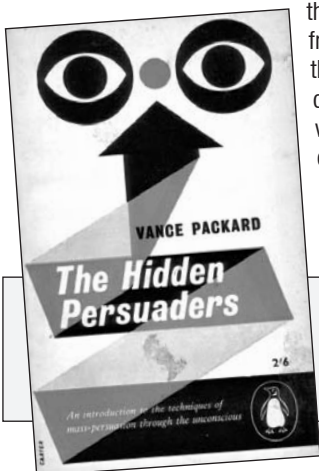
Advertising appeals not to our conscious thoughts but to our subconscious – our needs and fears, our childhood fantasies, our sexual desires. It uses colour and movement and humour and familiarity and surprise. By working at this level of brain activity, they bypass routine controls. Their appeal is largely beneath the level of words and language, and this puts them beyond logical resistance or contradiction.

This is the flaw with contemporary 'educational' programmes like MediaSmart ([www.mediasmart.org.uk](http://www.mediasmart.org.uk)) which are proposed by the advertising industry, and gaining political currency, as a means of explaining to children how advertising works. MediaSmart may teach us a lot about the way industry likes to portray itself, but it does nothing to protect us from commercial exploitation of our subconscious.

Like stealth bombers, the advertising, packaging, shelf-positioning and other tricks of the trade get to us beneath our radar. However, much of our social discourse operates at a similar level, of course, and it would be a dull world indeed if we had to justify all our actions on a rational basis.

But to use these direct pathways for commercial exploitation is deeply immoral, argues Packard. *'I prefer being non-logical by my own free will and impulse,'* he declares, *'rather than to find myself manipulated into such acts. The most serious offence many of the depth manipulators commit is that they try to invade the privacy of our minds.'*

The words echo as strongly now as they did when first published. Marketeers continue to persuade us to buy products we don't really want and which undermine our health, using methods of deep manipulation that are just as well hidden now as they were 50 years ago.



**50 years of exposure: Vance Packard's seminal book revealed the methods used by advertisers to make us buy products – from cigarettes to cars, from religion to beer – whether we think that we want them or not.**

# Stopping the rot in



**Barrie Margetts,**  
**Editor-in-Chief of the scientific journal Public Health**

**Nutrition, examines the issue of commercially motivated and sometime fraudulent nutrition research.**

In 2005, huge media attention surrounded the revelation that a leading researcher, Hwang Woo-Suk from South Korea, had fabricated scientific data. Hwang published fraudulent research results in the peer-reviewed journal *Science* claiming that his team had cloned the world's first human embryonic stem cells tailored to match the DNA of individual patients

Nutrition scientists reacted to the publicity with a sense not so much of outrage, as of 'There but for the grace of God goes nutrition!'

We have reason to feel uneasy. Beginning in 2002, letters in *Nutrition* and the *Lancet*, a news story followed by correspondence in the *British Medical Journal* questioned the veracity of papers published in two of those journals and elsewhere. In response the author pointed out some mistakes in the criticisms and made a case for his results. He said he could not provide his data for new analysis because he had left his university for another country, data were in store and some had been mislaid.

The individual whose work was questioned is not an ordinary nutrition scientist. Since the early 1970s he has been exceptionally productive. In 1974 his papers began to be published in the respected medical journal the *Lancet* which, in 1983, asked him to summarise knowledge in his field. He has also been powerful. Between 1980 and December 2003 he was chief editor of an international nutrition journal. From 1991 to 1994 he was founding head of a WHO Centre for Nutritional Immunology. In 1997 he was president of the 16th International Congress on Nutrition in Montréal, Canada. In 1999 he advised the US government how to improve the nutrition and immune function of combat soldiers. He has been said to have been twice recommended for a Nobel Prize.

The papers identified as troublesome are also extraordinary. They conclude that nutritional supplementation can, for elderly people, protect

against infection and greatly improve memory and ability to learn, and so delay or even reverse dementia. However, the formulation for the supplement used is patented by the scientist and marketed by a company founded by him or his daughter. Another paper by him with similar results appeared in 2002 in the journal he edited. The paper was stated to have been submitted and accepted on the same day. A supportive paper by another author was stated to have been submitted on that same day and accepted the next.

In 2005, not having had sight of any original data and because of the accumulated evidence of implausibility, *Nutrition* retracted the paper it had published in 2001. The *British Medical Journal* decided this was a prima facie case of fraud and wondered if other published papers by the scientist also included fabricated data.

At the end of January this year the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) broadcast a three-part investigation. This disclosed attempts to 'blow the whistle' on the scientist beginning in the early 1990s. CBC found that his university took no action on the findings of a committee of enquiry that agreed with the whistle-blower, concluding that the scientist had fabricated data. Certainly since July 2002 he has been styled at scientific and other meetings as Provost and Vice-Chancellor of the Université Internationale des Sciences de la Santé, based in the ski resort of Crans-sur-Sierre in Switzerland which, as far as the CBC investigation could tell, is a PO box.

The evidence presented indicated he had indeed fabricated more data, for another study published in the *British Medical Journal* as well as his and another journal, concluding that some types of baby formula are less likely to cause allergic conditions such as eczema and asthma. The study was funded by manufacturers to test their brands of 'hypoallergenic' formula. Later he published a paper in his own journal whose conclusions supported his own study.

## Epidemic misconduct

So the 'rough justice' of a media investigation has exposed a major case of fraud in nutrition science. Here the matter begins. The scientist's name is Professor Ranjit Chandra, but this is not a story about an individual. It is about a system and a culture that makes the thought of misconduct too tempting and actual misconduct too easy.

In the 17th Century, Samuel Butler mocked the pomp of the founders of the Royal Society in his satirical poem *Hudibras*. He wrote: '*What makes all doctrines plain and clear? About 200 pounds a year. And that which was prov'd true before, prov'd*

*false again? 200 more!*' It is often said that nutrition is mostly fad and fashion; a worse charge is that the judgements of too many nutrition scientists are for sale.

The governance of nutrition science is in question. How is its funding, practice and publication controlled? How can fraud remain undisclosed for so long, and what does this imply for other misconduct? How can anybody now take the findings of nutrition scientists on trust? Nobody can say 'this is an isolated case'. It can't be said that 'nobody suspected' because some people knew a decade ago, and the whole issue has been in the public domain for three years.

## Fabrication and ghosts

Indeed, we can't say 'this won't happen again' because it will, and it does. In his early life Robert Clive pillaged vast areas of India. Later in the 18th Century, as governor of Bengal, he audaciously observed: '*It is no wonder that corruption should find its way to a spot so well prepared to receive it.*' Fraud in research science is not rare, particularly when patentable substances, such as drugs, and also nutrition supplements, branded foods and drinks, food formulae and genetically manipulated foodstuffs, are involved.

An informal survey published in 1988 carried out by Stephen Lock, a former editor of the *British Medical Journal*, of 80 senior UK research scientists, found that half knew of studies they believed to be fraudulent, of which over half had been published. Of these, only six cases had led to any form of retraction. The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) was set up in 1997 by a group of journal editors. By 2000 COPE had examined 103 cases of alleged misconduct by researchers of published papers, of which 80 showed evidence of misconduct: of these, 15 involved falsification and eight fabrication.

Another form of fraud is research using phoney authors. In 2003 an investigation carried out by a UK newspaper guesstimated that up to half of all papers published in medical journals on drugs are ghost-written, often with minimal contributions from the 'authors'. The response from Richard Smith, Stephen Lock's successor as editor of the *British Medical Journal*, was: '*We are being hoodwinked by the drug companies.*'

After leaving the *British Medical Journal* Richard Smith went further. In 2005 he said that between two-thirds and three-quarters of all clinical trials of drugs are funded by industry; that industry is able to manipulate the questions asked by such trials and their study designs so as to produce results favourable to the drug; that one-third of such trials

# nutrition science

published in the *British Medical Journal* are so funded, and that medical journals are 'an extension of the marketing arm of pharmaceutical companies'. Richard Horton, editor of the *Lancet*, said the previous year: 'Journals have devolved into information laundering operations for the pharmaceutical industry'. This February, the *New York Times* reported that journalists are now more sceptical of findings published in scientific journals.

## Rent-a-profs, industry fronts, conflicts of interest

Many scientists see no problem with accepting money from commercially or ideologically interested parties, whether or not disclosed, and some are prepared to 'speak for the product'. In either case, if questioned, they are likely to say that their integrity is not in question and their judgement is not affected. Such competing or conflicting interests may be considered so common as not to be worth mentioning. Observers are likely to think differently; to quote an old saying: 'Whose bread I eat, his song I sing'. In courts of law, evidence is given less or even no weight when a witness is known to have an emotional, financial or other interest in the case. The same applies, or should apply, in science.

A remarkable example of conflicted interest exposed in the UK press in February is that of the Association for Research into the Science of Enjoyment (ARISE). Founded in 1988, ARISE is described as 'a worldwide association of eminent scientists', with a mission to show that 'everyday pleasures such as eating chocolate, smoking, drinking tea, coffee and alcohol contribute to the quality of life' and that deprivation of such pleasures, also including consumption of cream cheese, butter, cakes, ice cream and red meat, could cause a series of ailments, even brain damage.

The media enjoyed this hedonistic message: it seems that 195 print and broadcast stories appeared between September 1993 and March 1994, and continued certainly until 2004. Details of ARISE emerged as documents were disclosed after legal actions. These show that in 1994-95 its proposed budget was \$773,750, almost all from cigarette manufacturers, with small amounts from food and drink companies. Originally the Association for Research in Substance Enjoyment, ARISE is also a front for Big Tobacco and its food and drink interests.

Undisclosed hiring of the facilities; knowledge and reputations of universities, research institutes, scientific departments and of individual scientists

(known as the 'rent-a-prof' phenomenon) is well-known in the public health field; as is systematic funding of research in sensitive areas by interested parties, the dependence of congresses on support from transnational food manufacturers, and the influence of not-for-profit entities mainly funded and controlled by food, drink, agrochemical and/or pharmaceutical companies. These are reasons why nutrition science is not taken as seriously as we would wish, either by people in the know or by government, the media or the public.

## What is to be done?

The funders, administrators, practitioners and publishers of nutrition science have a duty to make our profession candid. We can start by accepting that we are human. There is no reason to believe that scientists are by background or training any more or less likely to be corrupt or become corrupted than members of any other profession.

We should also accept that nothing can stop all fraud. In business, cases like Enron in the US, Robert Maxwell in the UK and Parmalat in Italy will happen again. The same is so in science. The most we can do is to help make fraud rare. Also, action designed to prevent outrage can, in treating one disease, cause others. Laws designed to prevent terrorism that have reduced civil liberties have proved to be troublesome.

Nor can we realistically expect science to be free from influence by ideologically and commercially interested parties. The good old days

when science was completely independent never existed. The most we can do is to help make honesty the best policy.

As editor of the journal *Public Health Nutrition*, my conclusion is that the opportunities for venality, corruption and fraud in nutrition science are now too manifest, and the guards against them too casual. To repeat, the indictment is less of individuals, more of a culture that puts much temptation in the way of researchers who, seeing the rewards of greed all around, think of cooking their books, padding their bank accounts or modifying their opinions, do so once and have reason to believe that the risk of discovery or even of criticism is slight.

As the former President of Harvard has pointed out, there is a limit to what any one university or research centre can do in a climate of pressure to support industry, and also government, with useful research results. Individual journal editors can tighten up review systems, and lay media editors can tell reporters to insist on being told the source of funding of scientific findings, but there is a limit to what even those with substantial salaries and staff can do. The only effective action will be concerted.

■ **This article is a condensed version of an editorial first published in *Public Health Nutrition* in April 2006, published by CABI Publishing. The article remains the copyright of the author 2006. A fully referenced copy of the full article is available at [www.foodcomm.org.uk/margetts.htm](http://www.foodcomm.org.uk/margetts.htm)**

## Science policy for sale?

It is often enlightening to look to America to see where a 'free market' approach can lead. In the US a sister organisation to the Food Commission runs a campaign to expose industry influence on scientific research.

Entitled *Integrity in Science*, the campaign is run by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). Campaign investigations conclude that there is strong evidence that researchers' financial ties to chemical, pharmaceutical or tobacco manufacturers directly influence their published positions in supporting the benefit, or downplaying the harm, of the manufacturer's product.

*Integrity in Science* advocates full disclosure of funding sources, with information published in a way that can be scrutinised (e.g. websites); a review of who sits on government advisory committees; and for journalists to ask

routinely about possible conflicts of interest and to provide this information to the public.

Another US campaign called *The Revolving Door* also tracks how corporate interests influence government decision-making.

In light of concerns raised by Professor Barrie Margetts and Professor Erik Millstone (see page 8), the Food Commission believes that just such a campaign is needed in the UK. If *Food Magazine* readers know of anyone who might be interested in financing or contributing to an investigation and campaign to secure the scientific independence and integrity in UK food, agriculture and nutrition policy, please get in touch with the Food Commission.

■ **CSPI's website is at: [www.cspinet.org/integrity/about.html](http://www.cspinet.org/integrity/about.html)**

■ **The Revolving Door website is at: [www.revolvingdoor.info](http://www.revolvingdoor.info)**



# Two ways to tack

**While American lawyers prepare to take soft drinks companies to court over the presence of benzene in their products, the measures taken in the UK tell a different story.**

The Boston-based legal firm McRoberts, Roberts & Rainer is to file class action law suits against Zone Brands, the makers of Bellywashers drinks, and a second manufacturer, Polar Beverages, after independent laboratory tests found benzene in several soft drinks on supermarket shelves.

Benzene is a potent carcinogen and neurotoxin, inducing headaches, dizziness and sleepiness in small doses. It is believed to form in soft drinks that are on shop shelves for long periods, and is generated from acids, such as ascorbic acid (E300, vitamin C), acting on benzoate salts, such as the preservative sodium benzoate (E211).

The private legal action comes after the US government's Food and Drug Administration

(FDA) revealed it had found several soft drinks products with benzene above the 5 parts per billion (ppb) limit permitted for US drinking water.

Lawyer Tim Howard, a veteran of litigation against tobacco companies, said: 'Parents have a legal right to know if benzene is present in their children's drinks. Responsible corporations must act to remove these lethal toxins.'

Consumer anger over the finding of benzene in popular drinks mounted when the FDA admitted they had first known about the problem 15 years ago, and had agreed with the soft drinks industry at the time that they would not make a public announcement provided that the industry re-formulated their products to reduce the contamination.

The American Beverage Association, whose chairman is also head of Polar Beverages, stated that the levels of benzene were safe. The association said that people got more benzene from breathing the air around them every day.

## And in the UK?

Matters are rather different in the UK, where our own Food Standards Agency sampled benzene levels in 150 samples of soft drinks, and found 41 to be contaminated with benzene, including nine samples that showed benzene levels above the 5ppb American threshold. We name the products in the table shown opposite.

However, here in the UK, we do not expect a class action lawsuit against any of the companies concerned. And we do not expect prosecutions from the FSA. Indeed the FSA released a statement to the press that could have been written by the American Beverage Association, stating: 'People should not be alarmed if they have drunk these products. Levels of benzene reported in this survey will only make a negligible impact on people's overall exposure to benzene and so any additional risk to health is therefore likely to

be minimal.' The FSA continued: 'In more than two thirds (107 out of 150) of the samples tested, the levels of benzene were undetectable. A total of 38 samples had levels of benzene between 1 and 10 ppb below the guideline level set by the WHO for water of 10 ppb.'

'People would need to drink more than 20 litres of a drink containing benzene at 10 ppb to equal the amount of benzene you would breathe from city air in a day.'

However, when we investigated this casual reference to benzene from air pollution, we found that you would have to spend around *two months* camped on the pavements of inner London to absorb the amount you would get from 20 litres of 10ppb benzene-laced drinks (see column on the right).

We also challenge the FSA's casual use of the World Health Organisation's definition of contamination of drinking water, which recommends levels below 10ppb. This apparently lenient level is set by the WHO in its document *Guidelines for Drinking-Water Quality 3rd edition (current) 2004*, which makes it clear that this level is far from risk-free.

In the footnote to the table specifying the 10ppb limit, the WHO guidelines state that this value '... is the concentration in drinking-water associated with an upperbound excess lifetime cancer risk of 10(-5) (one additional cancer per 100,000 of the population ingesting drinking water containing the substance at the guideline value for 70 years).'

In other words, this level would be likely to lead to as many as 600 cancer cases in a population the size of the UK.

But much more alarming is that the FSA was comparing products to a WHO guideline rather than to the UK's own legislation, which has much stricter requirements for drinking water. The UK adopted the European

## The trouble with benzene

The effects of chronic exposure to low levels of benzene is not well-documented for humans. Epidemiological evidence suggest that the most sensitive responses to benzene are those related to the blood-forming organs. In laboratory animals the exposure levels tend to be higher for shorter periods of time, and controlled tests suggest there are risks of:

- decreased immune responses
- bone marrow damage
- leukaemia
- other cancers
- reduced birth weights
- damage to foetal DNA
- damage to sperm DNA

Source: *Prioritization of toxic air contaminants – enforcement of the Children's Environmental Health Protection Act 2001, Benzene*. Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, California, 2004. [http://www.oehha.ca.gov/air/toxic\\_contaminants/pdf\\_zip/benzene\\_final.pdf](http://www.oehha.ca.gov/air/toxic_contaminants/pdf_zip/benzene_final.pdf)

**Traces of benzene were found in several soft drinks tested in late 2005. Manufacturers say that they will now re-formulate although many have known of the problem since 1990.**



# Like benzene

Commission Drinking Water Directive in 1998 which stipulated that, by 2003, the benzene in our tap water must not exceed 1mcg/litre – just one part per billion, or a tenth of the WHO limit.

So why doesn't the FSA mention this in its news releases? Would it make some of the soft drinks companies look a bit too cavalier with our health, perhaps? And would the FSA look rather pathetic in its lackadaisical pursuit of the rogue companies? Instead the FSA makes its bland pronouncements, feeding straight to the public relations agencies of the soft drinks companies. Hence the British Soft Drinks Association happily put out a press statement saying that the Food Standards Agency survey shows 'that the levels of benzene that have been found are very low and that soft drinks are safe to drink'.

The fact that soft drinks do not have a specific regulation on benzene should not be a consideration – drinks should surely be as clean as drinking water. But soft drinks companies have been happy to hide behind the lack of regulations, with Twinings claiming that drinks found to contain traces of benzene 'comply with the relevant UK and EU food legislation.'

The FSA claims it would like benzene levels in soft drinks to be 'all but eliminated' but is it prepared to use the law to get it? A spokesperson would only say that they were preparing 'to discuss the matter with industry representatives'.

A court case might sharpen their minds considerably.



## Are soft drinks better than traffic fumes?

The UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA) has parroted the US beverage industry in claiming that the levels of benzene in soft drinks are negligible compared with city air pollution. But when we took a look at the figures, we found that the FSA's casual acceptance of benzene in soft drinks is based on flawed maths.

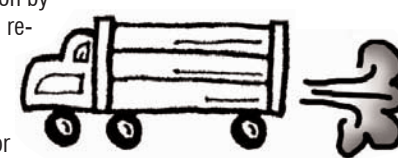
The FSA's calculations were based on an EU-commissioned paper estimating exposure to chemicals in the environment.\* Although published in 2005, figures are based on air quality tests conducted in the previous 30 years in 42 cities around the world, for an average level of 13mcg/m<sup>3</sup>. The report adjusted this to account for time spent indoors (9mcg/m<sup>3</sup>), and 10% of the day spent inside a car (19mcg/m<sup>3</sup>) to reach a combined estimate of around 10mcg/m<sup>3</sup> averaged over a day.

Yet this is over ten times the amount found in routine air-quality monitoring in Lambeth, inner London. Figures show levels falling from below 2mcg/m<sup>3</sup> in the late 1990s to below 1mcg/m<sup>3</sup> since 2002, with 2004's latest results showing annual mean levels of 0.7mcg/m<sup>3</sup>.

The EU's report also took no account of the exhalation of benzene during breathing. The Californian Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment states that around 30% of air-borne benzene is absorbed and 70% breathed out again. So each cubic metre of air inhaled in Lambeth in 2004 would supply about 0.2mcg of benzene into the blood stream.

Instead, the FSA multiplied 22 cubic metres (the amount of air breathed by an adult during a day) by a high figure of 10 mcg/m<sup>3</sup> atmospheric level, to get 220 mcg daily exposure. This figure was seized on by

the FSA and re-described not as exposure estimates for active adults



living in the 1980s but as absorption levels for the whole population in cities today.

We calculate that the actual figure should be around 3 to 5 mcg per day. In contrast, around half a litre of some of the soft drinks tested by the FSA would give the same quantity of benzene in just a few minutes.

\* Bruin YB *et al*, HEXPOC – Human Exposure Characterisation of chemical substances; quantification of exposure routes, Institute for Health and Consumer Protection, Italy. EU 21501 EN, European Communities, Luxembourg, 2005.

### Bellyache for Bellywashers?

**Zone Brands is one of the companies facing a legal challenge in the US over the presence of benzene in some of its Bellywashers drinks.**

**Bellywasher products come in collectible toy bottles promoted with popular characters such as Spiderman, the Incredible Hulk and Cat in the Hat (pictured right, from our product**

**collection), or with toys or puzzles incorporated into the lid. Ironically, this is promoted as a healthy choice. The Cat in the Hat version is described on the bottle as a '100% vitamin C drink' and the Bellywashers website boasts '2/3 less sugar than leading juice drinks'.**

### UK soft drinks with benzene levels above 5ppb

Drinks containing benzoate salts (E210-E219) plus ascorbic acid (E300, vitamin C) have been identified as likely to produce benzene, especially if they sit on the shelf a long time exposed to light and warmth. The Food

Standards Agency survey found 41 soft drinks with levels of benzene above the UK drinking water maximum level of benzene of 1ppb (part per billion, equal to one microgram per litre). The most contaminated products are listed here.

Brand	Drink	Benzene ppb
Co-op	Low calorie bitter lemon-1	28
Popstar	Sugar-free lemon and lime	17
Hyberry	No added sugar blackcurrant squash concentrate	12
Co-op	Low-calorie bitter lemon-2	11
Morrisons	No added sugar pineapple and grapefruit crush	11
Twinings	Cherry flavoured iced tea	9
Twinings	Raspberry flavoured iced tea	8
Lilt	Pineapple and grapefruit crush	7
Silver Spring	Sparkling orange	6

Benzene at levels of 1ppb or more were also found in Robinsons Fruit Shoot, Vimto no-added-sugar, and products from other brands (Barr, Boots, C&C, Club, Fanta, Mace, Sainsbury's, Schweppes, Smashers, Tesco, Waitrose and Wellman). Figures are all for 2005.

# What the doctor reads

## The latest research from the medical journals

### Cutting animal foods may help weight loss

In an on-going survey of vegetarian diets as part of a European project on diet and cancer, a five-year follow-up has shown that people who reduce the amounts of animal-based foods are likely to gain the least weight.

Previous studies have suggested that vegetarians and vegans are leaner than omnivores, but data on changes over time are sparse. A study of over 20,000 adults participating in the Oxford-based study were surveyed during 1994-1999 and again five years later. The mean annual weight gain was 389g in men and 398g in women, but weight gain was somewhat smaller in vegans (284g in men and 303g in women) and fish-eaters (338g women only) compared with meat-eaters. Men and women who changed their diet in one or several steps in the direction from meat-eater to fish-eater to vegetarian to vegan showed the smallest mean annual weight gain of 242g and 301g, for men and women respectively.

Further details of the EPIC programme are available at [www.iarc.fr/epic/](http://www.iarc.fr/epic/). The programme has involved collecting dietary and health data from over 500,000 adults in 23 areas across 10 European countries. To date just over 24,000 cancer cases have been identified in the follow-up period. One of the most important results has been to show a protective effect of high fibre intake and fish consumption against colorectal cancer, while high consumption of red and processed meat products increase the risk. For lung cancer, the first analyses found a protective effect of fruit intake but no association with vegetable consumption. No association was observed between vegetables and fruit intake and the risk of prostate cancer or breast cancer.

**M Rosell et al, *Int J Obesit*, online 14 March 2006.**

### Salt raises risk of gastric cancer

Among several problems associated with eating salty diets, researchers in Lithuania have now identified gastric cancer as specific risk.

Gastric cancer is a particular health problem in Lithuania but there are few studies assessing the reasons for this. A new report has compared the dietary histories of 379 gastric cancer cases with 1,137 controls that were cancer and gastric diseases free. Cases and controls were matched

for gender and age. The gastric cancer cases had significantly lower education level and mostly resided in villages. After adjustments for other dietary habits and smoking, alcohol consumption, family history on cancer, education level, and residence, a higher risk of gastric cancer was found for those using salt additionally to a prepared meal or those who liked salty food. Intake of salted meat, smoked meat and smoked fish was also linked to a significant increase in the risk of gastric cancer.

**L Strumylaite et al, *Medicina (Kaunas)* 42(2):164-70, 2006.**

### Dietitians must listen to their clients

A Canadian study of what dietetics students believe are their clients' barriers to healthy eating and what the clients themselves believe showed discrepancies that dietitians should heed. In a survey involving nine students of dietetics and six students of other subjects, all female,

participants described healthy eating as consuming all food groups of the national Food Guide to Healthy Eating, with the associated notions of moderation and balance.

Benefits of healthy eating were cited as a healthy weight, good physical appearance, feeling better, preventing disease, and achieving personal satisfaction. Barriers to healthy eating included lack of time, choice, taste preferences, and finances. Interestingly, there was some discrepancy between what the dietetics students perceived as barriers for clients (such as lack of information) and the barriers the potential clients perceived for themselves (a wide range of problems including finances, time and taste). Making assumptions about the client's reasons for not eating a good diet might lead to inappropriate advice (e.g. giving them a leaflet on healthy foods) and would not match the clients' perceived barriers to achieving a healthy diet. The authors concluded that dietitians should not assume what their clients' barriers are.

**J House et al, *Can J Diet Pract Res.* 67(1):14-8, 2006.**

### United Nations' FAO talks of taxing fat people

The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation, long regarded as a pro-market, non-interventionist body, has indicated its willingness to discuss fiscal measures to change patterns of food consumption towards healthier diets.

A paper from the FAO's Global Perspective Studies Unit on the need for populations to follow Mediterranean-style diets notes that globally people are moving away from diets rich in fruits, vegetables and fish, including populations in the Mediterranean region itself.

It notes that many developing countries are undergoing dietary transitions towards more energy-dense foods. In parallel, many low-income countries are making little progress towards raising food consumption levels necessary for good nutrition and food security.

The paper continues by suggesting that possible policy responses to these problems include measures to raise awareness of the benefits of healthier diets and/or to 'change relative food prices in favour of such diets' (by taxing fattening foods).

It also suggests that 'at the extreme, making individuals who follow 'bad' diets, and thus are prone to associated diseases, bear a

higher part of the consequent costs borne by the public health systems' (tax fat people).

A second paper, prepared by the FAO's senior researcher Josef Schmidhuber, also finishes with this sting in its tail. Stating that raising the prices of energy-dense foods is unlikely to alter the consumption patterns of those eating those types of foods, the paper suggests that an alternative policy would be to tax excess bodyweight, using incentives and penalties in health insurance premiums.

The author acknowledges the problems with this idea – not least the assumption that individuals can easily make the necessary changes to their diet and exercise patterns, and that some individuals have been genetically pre-set to be overweight – but that other types of intervention, such as restrictions on production or marketing of unhealthy foods, or price interventions, would undermine global free-trade policy objectives.

**N Alexandratos, *Public Health Nutr.* 9(1A):111-7, 2006.**

**J Schmidhuber, The growing global obesity problem: some policy options to address it, 2005, [www.fao.org/es/esd/JSobesity.pdf](http://www.fao.org/es/esd/JSobesity.pdf).**





## Early weaning predicts obesity risk

A study of formula-fed and mixed-fed infants has shown that early weaning increases the amount of weight gain during the first few months and increases later obesity risk.

It has been shown in several studies that rapid weight gain in infancy and pre-school years predicts later obesity risk. Now a study following nearly 1,000 babies in the UK (the ALSPAC study\*) has found that energy intake was higher in first-born infants than in subsequent infants, and that energy intake at four months was higher in infants given solid foods earlier. Higher energy intake at four months predicted greater weight gain between birth to age one, two or three years and larger body weight and BMI at ages one to five years. No significant associations were seen in 300 breastfed infants.

\* ALSPAC is the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children also known as *Children of the '90s*, aiming to identify ways to optimise the health and development of children. See: [www.alspac.bristol.ac.uk](http://www.alspac.bristol.ac.uk)  
**KK Ong et al, *Pediatrics*. 117(3):e503-8, 2006.**

## Children eat what is advertised

Further evidence that advertising has a direct effect on children's dietary consumption has been shown in a US study of children living around the east-coast city of Boston.

Over 500 students from four communities were monitored over a two-year period. Their change in total food energy intake and their intake of foods commonly advertised on television were compared. The results showed that each hour increase in television viewing was associated with an additional 167 kcal per day consumption and with an increase in the specific consumption of foods commonly advertised on television.

The authors conclude that 'increases in television viewing are associated with increased calorie intake among youth' and that 'this association is mediated by increasing consumption of calorie-dense low-nutrient foods frequently advertised on television'.

**JL Wiecha et al, *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 160(4):436-42, 2006.**



## Chew On This

Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson, Puffin Books. [www.chewonthisbook.co.uk](http://www.chewonthisbook.co.uk) £5.00. ISBN 0 141 31844 9

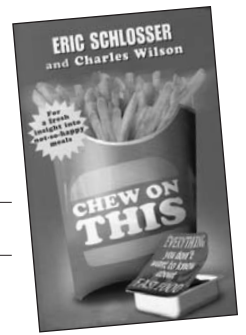
*Chew On This* is not, despite its title, a paperback version of the recently launched Food Commission *Chew On This* website for children (see [www.chewonthis.org.uk](http://www.chewonthis.org.uk)). In a happy coincidence, Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson have taken the best-selling *Fast Food Nation* and have updated it – producing a brand-new book aimed at both young and older readers. We loved *Fast Food Nation* and we love this book too – it's meticulously researched, easy to read and packed with jaw-dropping facts and figures.

The book is aimed at readers aged 12 and over, but don't let that put you off, even if your childhood days are a distant memory. This is a

refreshing and fascinating overview of fast food, explaining its origins, its marketing, its production and its effect on our health.

If you already own *Fast Food Nation*, this is a useful companion book. If you've never read *Fast Food Nation*, you should read *Chew On This* now.

- **The book is accompanied by teacher's notes which can be downloaded from [www.chewonthisbook.co.uk](http://www.chewonthisbook.co.uk)**
- **Don't forget to check out our children's food website at [www.chewonthis.org.uk](http://www.chewonthis.org.uk) – where children and inquisitive adults are taken behind the scenes to find out what really goes on in today's food and marketing industries.**



## The Savvy Shopper: All you need to know about the food you buy

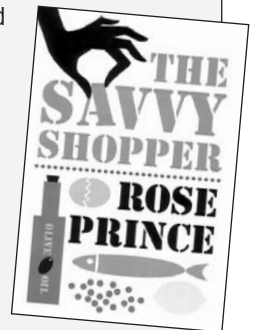
Rose Prince. Fourth Estate. £7.99. ISBN 0-00-721993-8

Rose Prince writes a regular 'savvy shopper' column for the *Daily Telegraph* in which she examines topical food issues and delves behind the labels of popular food products. This book brings together many of her investigations, presented as an alphabetical list of different food and drink products. Typical subjects include 'cherries, chicken, chocolate and cod' as well as 'pasta, peas, pheasant and pork pies'.

Several pages are devoted to each product, covering nutritional, environmental and (where appropriate) animal welfare issues. The author

lists the best producers and outlets around the UK and also quizzes the major supermarkets, so that those of us without access to artisan outlets can also make decisions about what we buy, and where we buy it.

*The Savvy Shopper* is an engaging and enlightening read, providing a wealth of information for anyone who chooses to think about the hidden costs that lie behind our everyday food and drink.



## Hungry Planet: What the world eats

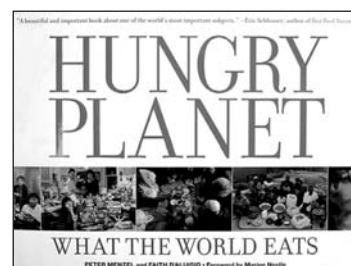
Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio. Material World Books. \$40.00. [www.menzelphoto.com](http://www.menzelphoto.com) ISBN 1-58008-681-0

This astonishing and beautiful photographic essay takes us on a global journey, detailing 30 families in 24 countries as they prepare 600 different meals.

The authors visit a suburban family in Brisbane, Australia; they eat with Sudanese refugees sheltering in eastern Chad and they break bread with the Batsuuri family of Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia. Each family

demonstrates the food they eat in a typical week and describe their favourite family recipes. The cost of their weekly food bill is given and cooking and storage methods are described.

Each family is beautifully captured both in words and pictures – producing an intimate, ground-level portrait of our pan-global food system. A fascinating book that is well worth tracking down.



# feedback

letters from our readers



We welcome letters from all of our readers but we do sometimes

have to shorten them so that we can include as many as possible (our apologies to the authors). You can write to The Editor, *The Food Magazine*, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF or email to [letters@foodcomm.org.uk](mailto:letters@foodcomm.org.uk)

## Free seed?

Many thanks for the latest *Food Magazine*. A very good read; congratulations. If I may offer a comment on the Terminator story published in FM72 – saved seed is not free. The farmer carries the costs of growing it, harvesting and storing it. The first two incur direct costs, and the third an opportunity cost (the potential income from selling the seed). These may well be cheaper than buying Terminator seed, but saved seed is certainly not free.

Ian Grant, by email

## Corrections

Our article 'Nutrition, mental health and behaviour' in FM72 should have been credited to Courtney Van de Weyer (not Weyner). In the same article we neglected to credit the photographer TS Whalen for both of the images we used, for which apologies.

## Marks & Spencer gets its GDAs in a twist

Reader Bridget Henderson alerted us to confused labelling on Marks & Spencer yogurts. Why, she wondered, did one product recommend a daily intake of 1,400 calories for women and 2,000 calories for men, when another recommended a higher daily intake of 2,000 calories for women and 2,500 calories for men? She sent us a label that clearly showed this confused advice, including the reassuring statement that these daily amounts were 'recommended by nutrition professionals for average adults'.

We investigated and found that M&S do indeed suggest two different Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs). One is for everyday use and the other is described as 'Guideline Daily Amounts for Sustainable Weight Loss'.

GUIDELINE DAILY AMOUNTS FOR SUSTAINABLE WEIGHT LOSS				
Recommended by nutrition professionals for average adults				
	Per 170g	Pot	Woman	Man
Calories	80	1400	2000	
Fat g	0.2	50	70	
Salt g	0.2	6	6	

GDA labelling is already confusing enough without supermarkets introducing different GDAs for different sectors of the market. And what exactly is 'sustainable weight loss'? Does this mean that slimmers who eat M&S products can sustain continual weight loss forever? That sounds like a one-way ticket to us!

## Why don't Shredded Wheat GDA sums add up?

You may be interested to see the enclosed side panel from a box of Shredded Wheat. You will see it claims that a 45g serving with 125ml of semi-skimmed milk provides, among other things, 48g of Whole Grain. Presumably at least 3g of that has to come from the milk?

GDA - Guideline Daily Amounts for women\*

45g serving (2 Biscuits) with 125ml semi-skimmed milk provides	% of GDA	Total GDA	
Calories	217	10.9	2000
Total Fats	3.2 g	4.6	70 g
Salt	0.2 g	3.3	6 g
Total Sugars	6.3 g	7.0	90 g
Fibre	5.3 g	22.1	24 g
Whole Grain	48 g	100.0	48 g

\* In general active men will have higher requirements, whilst young children will have lower.

Roger Griffin, Cambridge

We've seen the humble pinta enriched with omega-3 oils, plant sterols and even higher levels of melatonin (supposedly to aid sleep), but wholegrain milk is a new one to us!

However, further investigation reveals that this apparent anomaly is actually due to UK labelling legislation which requires ingredient quantities to be declared as 'put into the mixing bowl'. We understand that it takes 48g of wheat to make 45g of Shredded Wheat, as processing removes roughly 3g of moisture. Hence the curious figure of 48g.

## Nestlé admits that some ingredients are 'nasties'

I was delighted to see that Nestlé seems to think artificial colours, sweeteners and preservatives are 'nasties' in this advert for Ski yogurt. It's a pity that the company doesn't recognise the unidentified, and presumably artificial 'flavouring' present in its Ski yogurts as a 'nasty' as well: especially since, with the addition of a bit more good quality fruit, doctoring them with 'flavouring' wouldn't be necessary. Then Nestlé's yogurts really would be 'simple'.

Joanna Clarke, Glasgow

It seems Nestlé has no objection to adding what it admits to be 'nasties' to many of its other products. A snap survey found the following Nestlé products all contain artificial colourings, sweeteners or preservatives:

- Sveltesse Yogurt Smoothies (sweeteners aspartame and acesulfame-K);
- Sveltesse Real Fruit Yogurts (sweeteners aspartame and acesulfame-K and the preservative potassium sorbate);
- Aero Minty Bubbles (colouring brilliant blue FCF, which comes from the controversial range of azo dyes);

- 'Egg Splat' Fromage Frais Dessert (preservative potassium sorbate);
- Nesquik Magic Straws (sweetener aspartame-acesulfame);
- Coffee Mate Virtually Fat Free (colouring E171 – see 'sunblock' story on page 24);
- Vittel Flavoured Waters (sweeteners acesulfame-K and Sucralose);
- Rowntree (a Nestlé subsidiary) Fruit Pastille lollies (containing colourings E104, E124, E110 and E133);
- And of course, Smarties\* (containing several artificial colourings, that include azo dyes: E171, E104, E124, E122, E133 and E110 as well as E120 which can be derived from insect carcasses).

Needless to say, many of these products also contain unknown 'flavourings' along with a variety of thickening agents, stabilisers, acidity regulators, emulsifiers, antioxidants and other additives. This from a company that has trademarked the phrase 'keep it simple'!

\* Nestlé has just announced it will remove the artificial colourings from Smarties in June

2006. The company has said that it will be ploughing £3 million into an advertising campaign to stop declining sales of the brand.

## And the winners are...

A big 'thank you' to the many hundreds of readers who returned the feedback forms sent out with the last issue of the *Food Magazine*.

We are working our way through the feedback forms to see how we can improve the *Food Magazine*, and develop ideas for future articles, campaigns and product investigations. They make fascinating reading, and just go to prove that our readers have an enormous range of knowledge and experience from right across the food system.

It was also very heartening for us to find out that 99% of the readers who responded to the survey thought that the content is either 'excellent' or 'good'. Thank you!

We pulled the names of five lucky readers out of the hat and have sent each of them a copy of the book *Not On The Label* (Guardian investigative journalist Felicity Lawrence's brilliant exposé of UK food production).

## Kinsale fines 18th Century water cheats

On a recent visit to Kinsale, in southern Ireland, we saw this text on an antique poster in the old courthouse. The *Food Magazine* often highlights the widespread practice of pumping food full of water. It is clear that our ancestors were up to the same tricks over 300 years ago!

Lucy Jackson, Nottingham

### 1703 Presentment

We find and present that whereas we are credibly informed that some of the Inhabitants of this town make a practice of brewing with Gutter Water which it is to be feared may cause infection or by such nasty Custom at least bring a filthy Report on the place: for the future every person discovered so offending to pay two shillings six pence.

*Thanks Lucy – you're quite right that the adulteration of food and drink has been a problem for centuries, as this poster shows.*

*As Food Magazine readers will be aware, unscrupulous processors can now inject chicken with beef and pork proteins to make the meat act like a sponge: the more the weight of the water, the bigger the profit. At a meeting in January, to discuss the issue of water added to chicken, FSA officials reportedly could see no problem with describing water-filled meat in sandwiches as 'chicken', with E-number emulsifiers to hold the water in place. Just so long as the small print listed all of the ingredients. If only the FSA would take such a modern and enlightened view as the people of 18th-century Kinsale, and simply fine food cheats for watering down our food!*

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## Biscuits use sunblock as 'natural' colouring

In a consumer survey published in January, the government's Food Standards Agency found that consumers do not generally trust descriptions such as 'real', 'original' and 'natural' on food labels. No wonder when products such as these Jammie Dodgers (nearly 30% sugar and over 7% saturated fat) claim to have 'No artificial colours', but list *titanium dioxide* as a colouring. If it isn't artificial then it must be natural, we assume, but just how natural is it to have a mouthful of titanium dioxide?



crystalline form known as anatase. But even with a mouthful of rutile sand you would not be getting pure titanium dioxide. To purify the pigment, you must refine the ore: this means using either a sulphate process, which uses sulphuric acid as an extraction agent, or a chloride process, which uses chlorine. These processes were first used for bulk production of titanium dioxide less than a century ago.

With highly reflective properties, titanium dioxide is widely used in paints, plastics and paper coatings, and as a sunblock ingredient. It is also strongly oxidative, and is used for sterilising building materials and is added to anti-fouling coatings. On the label, the manufacturer of these biscuits ask 'What makes 'em so Yummy?' What indeed?

## Is green the colour of money?

A glossy supplement in the magazine *Green Futures*, from Jonathon Porritt's group Forum for the Future, is entitled *Sausage, Mash and Sustainability*.

It delves into the need to combat obesity, improve school meals, reduce salt in processed foods and promote local food supplies, such as beef from Hampshire farms into nearby schools.

All very laudable, but there were some odd extra boxes on some pages, extolling the virtues of school-meals providers Compass, Kraft Foods (makers of Dairylea Lunchables), and the promoters of British beef, the Meat and Livestock Commission.

No sign that these were paid-for advertisements, just useful information to boost the stories on healthier living, it appeared.

Until one got to the back page to find that the whole supplement had been sponsored by – yes – Compass, Kraft and the MLC.

And there was a fourth sponsor. You, dear readers, as tax payers, helped promote these advertorials with a grant from Defra.

But there is a nice twist to the story. If you go to the *Green Futures* website you will be asked to pay £24 or more to receive the magazine, including the supplement.

But if you go to Defra's website they have reproduced the whole thing for free!

See [www.defra.gov.uk/FARM/sustain/procurement/pdf/GFreport05.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/FARM/sustain/procurement/pdf/GFreport05.pdf)



## Sweets for dummies?

What's this? A baby's dummy that the manufacturer warns is unsuitable for babies? What a strange anomaly.

With an internal plastic spike inside this Baby Pop lolly, the warning is presumably due to the

danger of impalement on 'small parts'. But what about the danger to small teeth of prolonged exposure to a sugary sweet while a child is sucking on this amazing object?

Sadly, UK law seems more concerned with preventing accidents than preventing disease, so such products can continue to be sold.

## Waitrose: where the lights never say 'go'?

Our hearty congratulations to the supermarket chain Waitrose for being the first to adopt the government's approved traffic light scheme for nutrient labelling.

Despite an industry plot to make nutrient labelling as confusing as possible, with major companies launching contradictory schemes, using different nutritional criteria and confusing colour coding, bars, stars, wheels and blobs, the Food Standards Agency has stuck to its guns and called for a consistent and uniform approach using a simple set of traffic lights based on the FSA's definitions of low, medium and high levels of the key nutrients (fat, saturates, salt and sugars).

Waitrose has launched an FSA-approved traffic light scheme on its sandwich packs, and helpfully suggests that this 'can help you

balance your weekly intake'. It helpfully adds: 'If you choose a sandwich that is high in saturated fat one day, you might select one which is low or medium the next'.

But suppose you wanted to eat a healthy sandwich every day? We have visited Waitrose on two occasions to buy a sandwich with all the traffic lights set at green.

Alas! We could find not a single sandwich able to supply a fully healthy snack. Most of the best ones were let down by excess salt.

Perhaps this will shame the company into reformulating their products. We have long argued that best thing about nutrient labelling is not that it passes responsibility for good health to the consumer but that it exposes the practices of the producers.

How about an all-green sandwich, Waitrose?

## Thirst for knowledge

The European Commission appeared to be caught unawares by the benzene-in-soft-drinks scandal (see pages 18 to 19). According to the online trade magazine *BeverageDaily.com*, a letter dated December 2005 and signed by a Commission official stated that the Commission 'is not aware of any scientific evidence relating to the formation of benzene' as a result of using benzoates in soft drinks. It had asked EU member states to send any details in their possession.

Perhaps the Commission staff should have read an interesting report from the Italian Institute for Health and Consumer Protection.

The report states: 'Added benzoates and ascorbates might react to form benzene. If either one of the other were removed, the benzene might no longer be formed.' It goes on to list the benzene levels found in various drinks and juices, helpfully stating whether the samples had added benzoates.

The report also declares in large print on the front cover that the research was undertaken for... the European Commission! And the document was placed on the Commission's own research website in 2004.

PER 100g	PER PACK	
MED	Fat	6.2g
LOW	Saturates	1.8g
MED	Salt	0.8g
LOW	Sugars	6.0g
	Calories	265

**The best available? A 'healthy option' from Waitrose, but still not giving us the green light.**

**And the worst? Tesco's sandwich declares a hefty 58g fat – but all fat levels get the same green light!**

This pack contains				
Calories	Sugar	Fat	Saturates	Salt
879	8.2g	58.1g	15.6g	2.9g
44%	10%	83%	78%	48%
of your guideline daily amount				