

The

FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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Cereals steer clear of healthy labelling advice

New designs of cereal packs show how leading companies are combining forces in a bid to counter government-recommended nutritional labelling.

Kellogg's and Nestlé have both abandoned years' worth of publicly-funded research and switched their front-of-pack nutrition labelling to a format which directly challenges the consumer-friendly labelling recommended by the government's Food Standards Agency (FSA), the Food Commission, the consumer group Which? (Consumers' Association), the British Heart Foundation, the National Heart Forum and CASH (Consensus Action on Salt and Health).

Kellogg's has replaced its big, bold stripes across the top of its cereal packs showing proportions of nutrients present with much smaller 'tabs' giving numerical values only. The tabs are all one colour – pale blue – and so provide no instant indication whether the amounts are high, medium or low in terms of what a healthy diet should follow.

Nestlé has done the same, abandoning its own tabs with a larger number of smaller ones, also a pale blue, and showing numerical values only. Again, there is no colour coding to help provide an instant recognition of healthier and less healthy products for busy shoppers.

We believe the industry-supported label format is also set to be adopted by manufacturers such as

Danone, Kraft and PepsiCo. Along with Tesco, these leading brands have supported a nutritional signpost scheme, which gives levels of salt, sugar, fat, saturated fat and calories in a serving and shows how much it provides in terms of the GDA – the Guideline Daily Amount – an industry-set value representing the quantity an adult should aim to eat for a healthy diet.

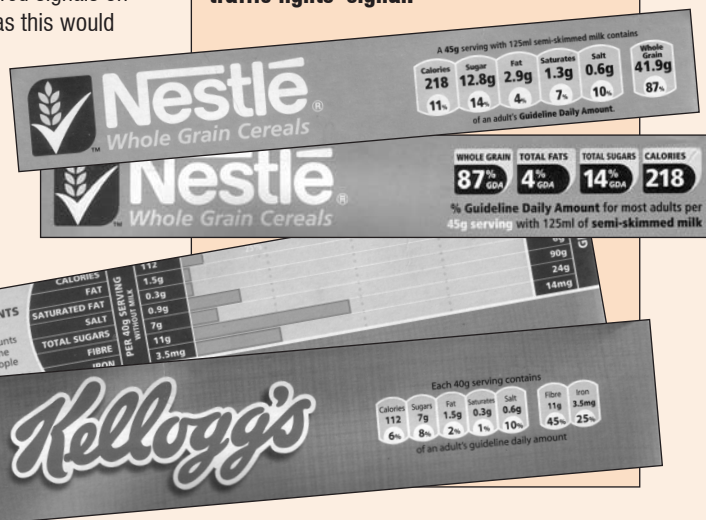
These companies are following the lead of the manufacturers' representative body, the Food and Drink Federation, which is brazenly challenging the FSA's alternative 'traffic light' food labelling scheme, which it describes as "simplistic" and "misleading". The industry are desperate to avoid putting clear red signals on foods high in sugar, fat or salt, as this would allow consumers to easily reject unhealthy foods, potentially slashing company profits.

Companies that have accepted the FSA recommendations – primarily retailers such as Waitrose, Sainsbury's and Asda – are preparing for a major battle by the end of this year as the two different labelling schemes go

head to head. Sainsbury's is reported to have suspended its membership of the British Retail Consortium earlier this year because the BRC wanted to back a numerical labelling scheme favoured by Tesco.

■ Sainsbury's data shows traffic light labelling helps shoppers make healthier choices, see pages 18-19.

Kellogg's has abandoned its stripes and Nestlé its four bold lozenges in favour of small identical tabs as the industry battles to avoid giving consumers a clear 'traffic lights' signal.



Also in this issue...

Kentucky Fried Coronaries?

We report on the latest lawsuit in the US, which sees an American doctor holding KFC to account for the trans fat in its food.

Do we need a daily dose of bacteria?

The market for 'one-a-day' probiotic and prebiotic products is huge, but are they necessary?

An insight into our hungry planet.

We catch a glimpse of what people eat around the world, and report on food and farming in China, the world's fastest growing economy.



The *Food Magazine* is published quarterly by The Food Commission, a national not-for-profit organisation campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food. We rely entirely on our supporters, allowing us to be completely independent, taking no subsidy from the government, the food industry or advertising. We aim to provide independently researched information on the food we eat to ensure good quality food for all.

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

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Checking out after 20 years



This summer, Tim Lobstein steps down as Food Magazine editor and director of the Food Commission. Here he wishes readers a personal farewell.

These are, for me, the saddest of times and the happiest of times. After more than 20 years in the Food Commission and its predecessor, the London Food Commission, inspired by its first director Tim Lang and enthused by all its staff and supporters, I am finally bowing out. The Commission has found itself a new director – someone with ample experience in journalism, great qualifications and plenty of enthusiasm to take us forward and inspire the next generation in turn.

The Food Commission and the *Food Magazine* have reflected my conviction that there is little room for compromise with something as megalithic and single-minded as the increasingly monopolistic food industry. The magazine's principles remain core to its identity: no subsidy from food companies and no advertising for food products.

The magazine is the mouthpiece of the Food Commission, and both institutions are devoted to fighting for better public health through good nutrition and healthy food production. The tensions between producer and consumer, between the producer's need for a return on capital and a consumer's need for value for money and a health-enhancing product, inevitably creates a 'them and us' conflict of interest. There really is no compromise or 'third way' of the sort promised by Labour before coming to power in 1997, unless capital is brought under democratic control – an approach that is manifestly absent from today's mainstream rhetoric.

Our refusal to take money from the industry has left us constantly struggling for enough resources to survive. When our original GLC grant ended in 1990, we cut our activities to the minimum needed to keep the magazine going, and have relied on you, our readers, subscribers and generous supporters, to pay our bills and basic wages.

The result is that we have kept the enterprise going, and even thriving, with a small staff and volunteers who have given generously of their time and skills. When journalists have called us they have assumed we were ten times the size, and they have marvelled at our ability to 'punch above our weight' in our media campaigns.

The expectations remain high, and our clout is as powerful as it has ever been. I am leaving the Commission as strong as it was a decade ago, with its work more relevant than ever before, especially as we face up to new challenges to our food system.

I hope to be continuing with occasional contributions to the *Food Magazine* while I also juggle a variety of consultancies for other non-governmental organisations and research institutions.

My successor, Jessica Mitchell, takes up her post in August, and will introduce herself here in the next issue of your very own *Food Magazine*.

Tim Lobstein
tim@foodcomm.org.uk

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Cadbury's: no admission, no apology

Bad luck for Cadbury's that the bacteria leaking from a filthy pipe into its chocolate was a very rare strain of salmonella – allowing diligent research by the Health Protection Agency to prove that the company must have been the source of suffering for dozens of children and adults across the country.

Cadbury's failure to keep its products safe for vulnerable youngsters has thrown its normally smooth public relations into chaos.

The company's first attempt to spin the story was denial on the grounds that the levels of bacteria in the chocolate were 'too low'.

But with three toddlers needing hospital treatment, the company had to change its tune. Realising it may be liable for prosecution and for civil damages, the company announced moves to recall an estimated million items from shop shelves, because 'some of these products may

contain minute traces of salmonella'. This was *five months* after the company knew it had a problem, and not for the first time either, as an identical bug – *Salmonella Montevideo* – had been identified in its products four years earlier.

The investigation concluded that Cadbury's was failing to use the widely recommended HACCP (Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points) methods for ensuring safe food production but focused only on unreliable end-product testing. The company made the assumption that a low level of contamination was acceptable. The investigators politely described Cadbury's safety protocol as "unreliable" and not what they would consider "a modern approach to risk assessment".

Cadbury's response to this onslaught? "We have changed our protocol because we understand that the consumer's desire for no risk at all is paramount." Not because it is illegal to sell contaminated food, knowing it is contaminated, and knowing it is being produced in a dirty factory?

No admissions. No apologies, unless you include the grudging "We regret that people have been unwell". The Cadbury's website offers you a full refund if you send back one of the wrappers from a withdrawn line. (No proof of purchase necessary, and they don't mind if you have eaten some of the bar!)

Oh yes, and faced with a bill of some £20 million in recalling products and the damage to its image, the PR department tried to patch things up with "We regret any concern the recent recall may have caused to our consumers."

Concern? Fury would be a better word. Cadbury's should have done it months ago, before anyone got sick.



Recalled chocolates. Children may have been poisoned by 'treats' like these, but what does Cadbury's say?

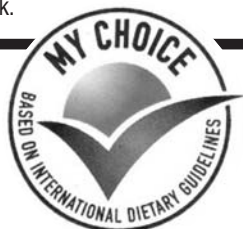
Industry resorts to a tick for health

Unilever, the multinational owner of brands such as Findus, Flora, Hellmann's and Wall's, is sidestepping publicly funded 'traffic light' labelling recommendations (see page 1) and simply adding a big tick to some of its products as an indication of nutritional health. The 'My Choice' scheme has not yet reached the UK, but is being trialled in Holland on 250 products that carry the phrase: 'International dietary guidelines recommend a limited intake of saturated fat, trans fat, sugars and salt (sodium). This product is in line with these guidelines'.

In the UK, Unilever's influence on labelling is also at work in the Nutrition Strategy Steering Group convened by the Department of Health and Food Standards Agency. The group consists of some very senior representatives of the food

industry – Gavin Neath (Unilever and Food and Drink Federation), Salman Amin (Pepsico), David Reid (Tesco) Steven Esom (Waitrose) Paul Kelly (Compass, the national catering chain), and Justin King (Sainsbury's). The only public health professional is Sandy Macara from the National Heart Forum, with consumers represented by Which? and Lord Whitty (Chair of the National Consumer Council).

Their current task? To draw up terms of reference for a government-funded study to evaluate the impact of front-of-pack labelling schemes on purchasing behaviour and consumer knowledge. With such an industry-weighted group, presumably we can expect ticks all round.



Government plans widespread GM contamination

The Department for Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published its much delayed consultation on proposals for managing the coexistence of genetically modified (GM), conventional and organic crops.

The measures that Defra proposes amount to a weak set of regulations that would facilitate widespread contamination by GM of non-GM and organic food up to a level of 0.9% that Defra says would not have to be labelled as GM. To give readers a sense of how much that would be, we estimate that the 0.9% threshold would be equivalent to about three GM beans in every 400g can of baked beans.

Although the Government insists it wants to provide choice for consumers and farmers, it is clear that this 'choice' would only begin once we accept a certain level of GM contamination.

"The Government have failed to listen to the concerns of people and slavishly followed the guidelines set down by the pro-GM European Commission," said Pete Riley, director of the GM Freeze, a coalition campaign for a moratorium on GM crops. "They are based on a false premise that pollen movement is predictable and human errors won't occur."

According to the GM Freeze, the separation distances put forward by Defra are inadequate, with 35m for oil seed rape and 110m for grain maize. Existing research shows this would make contamination inevitable in these crops.

The proposals question the need for a public register of where GM crops would be grown, meaning that most people would not know if GM crops were being grown near them. They also exclude gardeners and allotment holders from the scope of measures.

In addition, the proposed measures have limited liability for damage caused by GM crops and only cover direct financial losses of farmers. It is unclear who would be liable to pay compensation for making, for example organic produce unsaleable as such. Organic rules ban any use of GM food or ingredients.

Anyone concerned about the protection of the environment, the integrity of the food chain, and who wants to retain the right to choose genuinely non-GM food should take part in the consultation.

■ You can find more details, including a guide on how to take part and an email action, at www.stopgmcontamination.org or call GM Freeze on 020 7837 0642 (web: www.gmfreeze.org). The consultation is open to all, and the closing date for responses is 20th October, 2006.

■ The full text of the consultation is available at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/gmnongm-coexist/index.htm

US doctor sues KFC for trans fats

Colonel Sanders may lose his finger-lickin' appeal if a private lawsuit in the US wins when it gets to court.

Retired doctor Arthur Hoyte, of Rockville, Maryland is seeking to force the fried chicken fast food chain KFC to provide clear warnings to consumers that the products may contain harmful trans fatty acids (trans fats). His complaint springs from his purchase of fried chicken at KFC outlets in Washington, DC, and elsewhere, not knowing that KFC fries in partially hydrogenated oil.

"If I had known that KFC uses an unnatural frying oil, and that their food was so high in trans fat, I would have reconsidered my choices," said Hoyte. "I am bringing this suit because I want KFC to change the way it does business. I'm doing it for my son and others' kids-so that they may have a healthier, happier, trans-fat-free future."

His action is supported by the campaigning organisation Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), which claims that the widespread use of oil that has been hydrogenated – a process that causes it to become laden with trans fats – is contributing to the premature death of an estimated 50,000 Americans per year.

"Grilled, baked, or roasted chicken is a healthy food-and even fried chicken can be trans-fat-free," said CSPI executive director Michael F. Jacobson. "But coated in breading and fried in partially hydrogenated oil, this otherwise healthy food becomes something that can quite literally take years off your life. KFC

knows this, yet it recklessly puts its customers at risk of a Kentucky Fried Coronary."

Once thought to be innocuous, trans fat is now known to be more harmful than saturated fat, since it simultaneously raises one's LDL cholesterol, which promotes heart disease, and lowers one's HDL cholesterol, which protects against it. Trans fats also appear to encourage abdominal obesity, compared with other forms of fat. Small amounts of trans fat occur naturally in beef and milk, but over 70% of dietary trans fats are produced during industrial hydrogenation, a process which greatly extends the shelf life of fats and oils. They are widely used for deep frying and in fatty products such as pastries, pies, biscuits and cakes.

In the UK, KFC outlets provide no information on the ingredients of its products, and the website is similarly uninformative. Our intrepid team of reporters found, however, that the use of hydrogenated oil appears widespread across KFC outlets in western Europe.

American supermarket shoppers are now provided with trans fat information on their food labels, but restaurants and fast food outlets have been much slower to act. McDonald's

famously promised to reduce trans fat in cooking oil in 2002, though it quietly reneged on that promise in 2003. In 2004, California trial attorney Stephen Joseph filed a lawsuit against McDonald's over its broken promise, which the company settled in 2005 by agreeing to pay \$7 million to the American Heart Association. McDonald's still has not changed its oil. In the UK, the McDonald's website admits that the company uses hydrogenated oils in its deep frying.

Kentucky Fried Coronaries in the UK?
Packaging found outside a KFC outlet in North London reveals that the company uses hydrogenated oils



Parliamentary bill could reduce food miles

A new bill being introduced into Parliament aims to transfer more planning power to local communities, helping them to be able to accept or reject development proposals on grounds of sustainability.

Over 70 national organisations, charities and environment groups have already joined a coalition campaign for the Sustainable Communities Bill. If it becomes law, the new Bill requires the government to promote local and organic food as well as other measures to make communities sustainable, e.g. less development of green space and more local public transport.

Because of the Bill's approach, local food producers would have a much better chance of receiving active help from government. A bureaucratic hurdle removed here; a door opened there; some extra funding perhaps: all ideas that local people could feed into the process to be set up by this Bill.

The Bill would also level the playing field between local traders and supermarkets. Existing supermarket stores could be forced by local communities to have more local produce

on their shelves, or be charged a levy for their huge car-parks, with the money collected subsidising local amenities. Communities would also have the power to say no to proposed superstores via processes such as local referenda. They would also be able to take into account the impact on local businesses of out-of-town developments.

That's good news for reducing shopping miles and car fuel use – shown to be responsible for a large proportion of the food system's impact on the environment.

The Sustainable Communities Bill is radical, as it returns power to communities and diminishes central government's hold over planning. The campaign already has support from 335 MPs (over half the House of Commons), who have signed a parliamentary petition (an Early Day Motion, or EDM). The Bill will only become law with massive grassroots support.

■ Find out more and sign up to the campaign on the website: www.localworks.org.

FSA comes clean

A Freedom of Information request by the E.coli support group HUSH has revealed that McDonald's has been lobbying to reduce burger cooking times. These times are controlled in outlets selling prepared meat in order to reduce the number of food poisoning cases – such as those caused by *E.coli* 0157 – a particularly virulent and dangerous bacterium that can be controlled by proper slaughter methods, meat handling and adequate cooking.

McDonald's discussed this issue with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and requested reduced cooking times for their burgers. This was recorded in minutes of the meeting only as a request from an un-named burger chain. When HUSH asked the FSA which company had made the request they were told the information was commercially confidential, so HUSH used new Freedom of Information legislation and the FSA had to admit that the phantom burger chain was indeed McD. But for a government agency committed to 'putting consumers first', was it really necessary for the FSA to hide this information from the public?

Artificial sweeteners. The cure for obesity – or a causal factor?

A gathering of scientists in Brussels last June announced a 'consensus' view which stated *"it is now easier than ever to satisfy one's taste for sweetness while managing calorie intake, as consumers have a wide range of sugar-containing, low-sugar and sugar-free products to choose from"*.

That was actually a statement from the President of the host organisation Oldways, a 'food think tank' funded by trade associations and corporate bodies among others,* summarising the outcome of the meeting. The scientists themselves were reluctant to make the bold assumption that either sugar or artificial sweeteners were really so beneficial, preferring to suggest that such sweetening agents *"offer useful options in managing sweetness"* and noting that *"maintenance of a healthy body weight depends on wise management of energy from all food and drink sources"*.

But spinning scientific views to the advantage of the sweetening industry is hardly new, and the artificial sweetener companies are keen to promote the idea that their ingredients can solve the crisis in obesity.

"Studies have shown that foods and beverages sweetened with aspartame can be an effective 'tool' as part of a weight management program" says the aspartame website, which quotes research partly funded by the company NutraSweet, a branch of Monsanto which held the original aspartame patent. *"Low-calorie sweeteners have been shown to play a useful role in helping people lose and maintain weight,"* says the International Sweeteners Association.

And virtually every product labelled as a 'diet' drink contains artificial sweetener, giving the widespread impression that these chemicals will help reduce your intake of calories. In contrast, the sugar industry argues that artificial sweeteners are unlikely to have any impact on weight loss. The Sugar Bureau, a trade association funded by sugar producers, insists that, as sugar is not the primary concern when considering causes of obesity, replacement with artificial sweeteners would not affect weight control. And some sugar producers are now moving into artificial sweetener production in a bid to capture both sides of the market.

Furthermore, increasing numbers of research papers have thrown doubt on the assumption that artificial sweeteners are an aid to weight loss. Some have shown that if anything, these chemicals actually promote appetite.

Work on laboratory animals has shown that sweet tastes lead to the release of insulin, and that dissociation between sweet tastes and actual calorie intake can confuse the body so that it

cannot easily regulate appetite. The release of insulin without any sugar intake leads to hypoglycaemia, resulting in a rapid increase in appetite.

Human trials have had mixed results. A review by Harvard researchers concluded that there was no increase in appetite resulting from artificial sweeteners, but the authors were from a department that had received sweetener industry money. The review was roundly criticised by researchers whose work showed that consuming artificial sweeteners did indeed increase the amount eaten at the next opportunity, provided this occurred within an hour or so. By three hours there was no effect on appetite.

But perhaps the best evidence comes from a very different source. Pig producers are keen to get their animals fattened up in the shortest possible time, and have long sought for magic ingredients that will boost food consumption among their herds. Trials at Louisiana State University on palatability have shown greatest feed was consumed with the addition of flavouring agents - including artificial sweeteners and natural sweeteners.

Of 29 different combinations of additives, the one entitled Pig Nectar scored the highest rating, increasing consumption the most. The key ingredient in Pig Nectar was an artificial sweetener. In the US, saccharin is commonly added to pig and cattle

feed compounds to enhance feed consumption for growth. In Europe, the artificial sweeteners saccharin and neohesperidine are permitted in animal feedstuffs, under the Community Register of Feed Additives Rev 2 (2005).

So don't be a pig! If you want low-calorie drinks then try water flavoured with real juice. If you do go for the sweeteners, then maybe you should wait a while before eating anything, so as not to be fooled by an artificially induced appetite.

* Oldways' website is coy about who funds it, but a press release in 2004 acknowledges donations from Coca-Cola, Ajinomoto (makers of aspartame) and Tate & Lyle (makers of sugar and the sweetener Sucralose).



"Give us another snort of that diet coke..."

The re-invention of Sunny D?

Launched in 1998, and backed by an enormous advertising push, Sunny D was one of the most successful grocery launches of the decade. What it lacked in juice content it made up for with audacious advertising, claiming that it was 'the great taste kids go for'.

Health campaigners were quick to draw attention to its low-juice formula, whilst the Food Commission's Parents Jury – a panel of over 1,000 parents – gave Sunny D its 'Additive Nightmare' award in 2002.

Mums began to question the nutritional quality of the drink and sales plummeted. Despite several relaunches the manufacturer, Procter & Gamble, finally off-loaded the ailing product in 2004, selling it to the private equity group JW Childs Associates of Boston.

Under the banner of the 'Sunny Delight Beverages Company' the low juice drink is once again being relaunched, this time as 're-invented' Sunny D. But what exactly has changed?

Well, for a start, Sunny D has mimicked the Food Commission's Parents Jury, creating its own 'Parents advisory group' to advise it on how best to make and market the beverage. Judging by the company's progress so far, it has paid a lot of attention to the advisory group's recommendations on marketing, but rather less to the actual content of the product.

The vegetable oil has gone, which is a start, but what else has changed? The juice content is still a measly 15% – that's just six teaspoons of real juice in a 200ml bottle. And 're-invented' Sunny D still contains the preservatives, thickeners, starch, colourings and artificial sweeteners that put mums off in the first place, along with the inevitable sprinkling of added vitamins, presumably to persuade the same mums that it is actually a healthy choice.

It seems that the only real re-invention here is in the packaging – a fresh coat of paint splashed over a tired, discredited product.

Bob the Builder ditches the salt



Here is the Food Commission's version of the old game 'spot the difference'. We present three cans of Bob the Builder spaghetti. If you think the difference is the slight variations in label design and manufacturer, you'd be right, but the change is more than skin deep.

The three cans are from our archive, two from 2001 and 2005 when HP was making the pasta, and one from 2006 when Crosse & Blackwell took over. Whilst it seems that HP never managed to reduce the salt content in Bob the Builder pasta to any less than a 'high' 0.5g of sodium per 100g (1.25g of salt), Crosse & Blackwell has taken the level right down to what is described as only a 'trace'. Well done, Bob, for jumping ship! But how are other popular children's characters shaping up for salt content? Not so well, we fear.

Long-time readers of the *Food Magazine* will remember that Bob the Builder came under fire from the Food Commission's Parents Jury in 2003, for helping to promote fatty, sugary and salty food to young children. HIT Entertainment, which licenses Bob to appear on children's products, attended a meeting held by the Food Commission in 2004. There, they heard from BBC Worldwide, the commercial arm of the BBC, which had recently decided on a nutrition policy for food products on which it would allow its pre-school characters to appear – such as

the Teletubbies and Tweenies. Canned spaghetti was one of the products for which several character-licensing companies had been slated in the press. Some products contained more salt in a single serving than a small child should eat in a whole day.

Intrigued, we took a look at other spaghetti products in our archive and have reproduced what we found in the table below. Tinned pasta may not be the healthiest food in the world – but

Bob's salty history: HP products in 2001 and 2005 were high in salt. By 2006, Crosse & Blackwell has removed the salt.

at least Crosse & Blackwell has made the effort to remove salt from a food that many small children eat. Well done them!

■ For salt guidelines for toddlers, see *Salt & Health*: www.sacn.gov.uk/pdfs/sacn_salt_final.pdf

Spar worse than leading retailers on salt

Wow! What a lot of salt! 2g of salt per bag, when the maximum daily intake for adults is 6g.

We know that salt & vinegar potato snacks are always higher in salt than some other flavours, but Spar's version has even more than most. In 2005, the National Consumer Council's publication *Healthy Competition* reported on the salt content of own-brand salt & vinegar potato snacks in the top eight UK super-markets (not including



Spar). In 2006, Spar's version (at 1.6g of sodium per 100g) is four times more salty than the least salty crisps found in the NCC survey – Waitrose own-brand salt & vinegar crisps, at 0.39g of sodium per 100g.

As NCC pointed out at the time, it just goes to show that where you shop can affect your health without you realising it. Spar has rarely been in the spotlight for the nutritional content of its own-brand foods. Could this have anything to do with the continuing high salt content of its snacks?

Not all pastas are equal

Product	Character licence holder	Manufacturer	Previous salt level per 100g	Current salt level per 100g	Current salt per 200g portion	Change
Tweenies pasta	BBC Worldwide	Heinz	0.4g sodium 1g salt (2001)	0.2g sodium 0.5g salt	1g salt	Reduced by Heinz by 50%; still not low salt
Winnie the Pooh pasta	Disney	Heinz	0.3g sodium 0.75g salt (2004)	0.2g sodium 0.5g salt	1g salt	Reduced by Heinz by 33%; still not low salt
Postman Pat pasta	Entertainment Rights PLC	HP (bought by Heinz in June 2006)	0.5g sodium 1.25g salt (2001)	0.2 sodium 0.5g salt	1g salt	Reduced by HP by 40%; still not low salt
Scooby Doo pasta	Warner Bros	HP (2001), Crosse & Blackwell (2006)	0.5g sodium 1.25g salt (2001)	trace of sodium salt - nil	0g salt	Reduced to zero by Crosse & Blackwell
Bob the Builder pasta	HIT Entertainment	HP (2001), Crosse & Blackwell (2006)	0.5g sodium 1.25g salt (2001)	trace of sodium salt - nil	0g salt	Reduced to zero by Crosse & Blackwell

According to nutrition guidelines, toddlers aged 1 to 3 should eat no more than 0.8g of sodium (2g of salt) per day, with nutritionists recommending that parents add no salt at all, since there is plenty present in food naturally. Children aged 4 to 6 should eat no more than 1.2g sodium (3g salt) per day.

Is healthy local food better than a Mediterranean diet?

For more than a decade the advantages of eating a 'Mediterranean' diet have been widely promoted, but new research suggests that a healthy version of a traditional, local diet in northern Europe may actually be better for health.

Food writers have lauded the virtues of the diets of fish, fruit, vegetables and olive oil once commonly eaten around the Mediterranean basin, but which is now increasingly giving way to the burgers-and-cola diets eaten elsewhere in Europe and, indeed, much of the world.

Now new research investigating the dietary habits of over 5,000 Dutch women aged 60-69 has raised the suggestion that the healthiest diets may actually be ones based on local, traditionally eaten foods, provided that these contain a plentiful variety of fruit and vegetables.¹

The study was conducted as part of the large, pan-European EPIC² study on diet and cancer, and identified detailed components of dietary intake before following the women for nearly ten years to see which ones suffered an early death.

The women's diets were divided into three broad categories: a Mediterranean style diet (high intakes of vegetable oils, pasta and rice, sauces, fish, and wine), a Traditional Dutch dinner dietary pattern (high intakes of meat, potatoes, vegetables, and alcoholic beverages), and a Healthy Traditional Dutch dietary pattern (healthy variant of the Traditional Dutch dinner dietary pattern with high intakes of vegetables, fruit, nonalcoholic drinks, dairy products, and potatoes).

277 deaths occurred in 44,667 person-years. Independent of age, education, and other lifestyle factors, only the Healthy Traditional dietary pattern score was associated with a lower mortality rate. Women with the greatest adherence to this type of diet experienced a 30% reduction in the risk of an early death.

A previous study of Dutch dietary habits identified the Mediterranean and Traditional types

of diet, but did not find evidence of a healthy version of the traditional diet, possibly because the participants were from a younger age group. This suggests that the healthier aspects of traditional diets are disappearing from Holland as they are from the Mediterranean region.

The results can be compared with the findings of a nine-country study of elderly people's diets, also conducted within the EPIC programme, which examined the links between eating a Mediterranean diet and subsequent mortality rates.³ This found there was an overall effect taking all countries together - which supported the prevailing view that Mediterranean diets were good for health - but the details of the study reveal that the effect was highly significant for residents in Spain and Greece, but less significant in Italy, France, the UK, Denmark and Sweden, and not significant at all in Germany and Holland. The Mediterranean diet works best for people living by the Mediterranean, and may be of little value in Northern Europe.

And what about the olive oil, which is surely the most contentious part of the Mediterranean diet, given it is so rich in calories? A new study suggests that consuming olive oil as part of a Mediterranean diet does not raise your risk of being, or becoming, overweight.⁴ The study monitored the diets of 2,700 younger people for two years, and found that the amount of oil consumed was not linked to body weight at the start or weight gain during the period. Those consuming the most oil (the top 20% of participants) ate about ten teaspoons per day, but were not significantly heavier than the other participants.

The authors assume that the oil is therefore not obesogenic, at least within this dietary pattern, but they do not consider other local, historical aspects. The study was conducted in Spain, and Spaniards have been consuming olive oil since the times of the Phoenicians.

These studies raise interesting questions about human genetic adaptation to local food sources. We need to know more about the expression of genes in the presence of available nutrients and the transfer across the generations of localised gene-diet interactions for maximum health.

- 1) PM Waijers *et al*, *Am J Clin Nutr.* **83**, 1170-6, 2006
- 2) European Prospective Investigation of Cancer
- 3) A Trichopoulou *et al*, *BMJ*, **330**, 991-8, 2004
- 4) M Bes-Rastrollo *et al*, *Lipids*, **41**, 249-56, 2006

Badvertisement

Something fishy going on?

The message is beginning to get through that eating fish is good for your brain and heart. But it seems that people still can't bear to drag themselves away from their everyday diet. So manufacturers have risen to the challenge by adding fish oils to other food. However, whilst we might need to eat more fish oils, do we really need to eat more pizza?! This American product from AC LaRocco is fortified with 'Ocean Nutrition' omega 3 oils.

Meanwhile, the environmentalist George Monbiot reports that the US has thought of yet another way to deplete the world's fish stocks - by converting fish to biofuel. We despair.



Diet-behaviour link to be reviewed

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has completed a review of scientific evidence looking specifically into claimed health benefits of consuming omega 3 fats - including brain and behaviour. In June, the FSA stated that 'no clear conclusions can be drawn for these, including the association of diet and performance in children'.

However, the FSA also noted that it would consider the evidence in the context of a wider 'systematic' review of research looking at the effect of nutrition and diet on performance and behaviour of children in schools. This, they say, will help to inform the nutrition and food policies of government bodies such as the Department for Education and Skills, the School Food Trust, and education departments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

FSA faces up to organic challenge

The Food Standards Agency is the sponsor of a lecture and debate on organic food, to be held on 23 January 2007 at the Guildhall in the City of London. The FSA and organic sector have long been at loggerheads, with the former chair of the FSA Sir John Krebs having publicly stated opposition to health and nutrition claims associated with organic food. This has resulted in various spats between the organic sector and FSA over recent years.

So, as the FSA politely understates it on their website, this should be an 'open, lively and challenging debate about organic food'. The keynote speaker will be Peter Melchett, Policy Director of the Soil Association - the UK's leading organic certification and campaign organization, and the event is likely to attract around 600 participants. To find out more, contact the FSA on 020 7276 8000.

Food and farming in



Emma Hockridge reports on food and farming in the world's fastest growing economy.

The traditional image of China is one of a huge rural population, of peasant farmers in straw hats tending paddy fields by hand. More recently China has also become known for its powerhouse economy, producing many of the manufactured goods we take for granted in the West. Despite these strong images, China remains a mystery to many, in part due to a lack of openness in the Chinese political system.

As part of a group of UK and Australian Nuffield farm scholars I travelled to China in July to attempt to gain a better knowledge of Chinese food and farming and the recent changes that have occurred within the industry.

Chinese food and agriculture is full of huge contrasts, as is the country itself. During the 'official' tour, led by government officials, we were taken to the shiniest research institutes and what were thought to be the most efficient, and therefore best, farms. Luckily, as a result of having personal contacts in the country, we were also able to see some of the 'real' China, typified by village farms, each divided into holdings of half an acre per person. In these villages, oxen are still used to plough the vegetable plots, and pigs are still slaughtered on site for feast days.

The tour began in Guangzhou (formerly known as Canton), a bustling and thriving city with a population of 6.6 million people. The Southern Chinese population has a traditionally rice-based diet due to the hot and wet climatic conditions.

The people around the Guangzhou region are renowned across China for the huge diversity of food they consume. There is an expression they will *'eat anything with legs, unless it is a table and anything that flies unless it is an aeroplane'*!

Our group was fortunate to be given the opportunity to try a number of delicacies including silk worms, frogs with chilli, and of course the ubiquitous chicken feet. The dishes were met with varying levels of approval, but everyone tried them at least once. My personal favourite were the roasted silk worms, which were crunchy and delicately flavoured.

A visit to the Chinese Livestock Commission, an organisation that ominously includes the Kennel Club of China, revealed that there have been huge increases in the amount of meat that Chinese citizens consume, with a production level of 40 million tonnes per year 15 years ago, to a current level of 70 million tonnes per year, which is expected to rise to 77 million tonnes by 2010. This increase is mainly as a result of rising incomes amongst the population.

Animal welfare is not an important issue in China. When the cage sizes for EU battery hens were explained, one government representative said *"in China we could use this to raise cattle!"* Such attitudes were also in force at the region's largest dairy farm, where a herd of 3,000 Friesian cattle (the average UK herd is around 90 cows) was kept on concrete floors in 90% humidity and in temperatures of 34°C, shackled to short chains. It was not surprising that we saw widespread evidence of lameness and mastitis.

Dairy farming may seem out of place in a country where lactose intolerance is very common, but the government officials who led our visit skipped over this point (along with many others), telling us that such dietary intolerance only affects around 10% of the population. Although there are no official figures, studies have indicated that lactose intolerance affects around 30% of Chinese children, and a study of Chinese adults showed 92.3% suffered from some level of lactose mal-absorption.

Despite this, there is a huge push to encourage Chinese people to drink more milk. It is advertised as important for good health, the government funds milk rounds to schools and the state-run television has aired programmes on the benefits of milk drinking. Many of the world's top dairy companies have entered China as a result of seeing the huge potential market of 1.3 billion

inhabitants – though many of these companies find it hard to find reliable and hygienic supplies of raw milk in China itself.

The people in the South were noticeably of a much smaller build than those living in the larger cities in the North, such as Shanghai and Beijing. Here the diet traditionally contains many more wheat-based dishes, such as noodles and dumplings. Such grains are grown due partly due to the lower rainfall and richer soils of the area. There are also more market-based reasons for the increased size of people. In these cities, with their strong Western links, the march of Starbucks, Papa John's pizza, and of course McDonald's is clear to see, along with the health impacts that a Western diet can bring. Obesity amongst children is rapidly growing, with the incidence of overweight and obese children growing from 7.7% to 12.4% in urban areas from 1991-1997, but only 5.9% to 6.4% in rural areas.

Such fast food outlets are paraded as paragons of the country's economic development, and are prominently positioned in the centre of the cities. New development is to be seen everywhere. Motorways, railways and hotels are appearing with amazing rapidity, with huge teams of labourers working at all hours of the day and night, precariously balanced on traditional bamboo scaffolding. Such development is in part due to the upcoming Beijing Olympics in 2008.

Activity on an (almost!) Olympic level can be seen every day in the country's parks, where groups of elderly people can be seen exercising on brightly coloured gym equipment, and taking part in group Tai Chi, which contributes to the visible sprightliness of the older members of the population. When asked why no young people were taking part, the usual response was that demanding jobs simply did not allow the necessary time for exercise.

City-based jobs are highly sought after, particularly by those living and farming in the countryside due to the much higher wages offered. Twenty years ago an estimated 71% of Chinese were rural farmers; that figure is now down to 51%.

Although Chinese agricultural markets have become much more decentralised, the government continues to regard self-sufficiency in grain as a strong guiding principle. The question is often asked as to whether China can continue to maintain self-sufficiency despite its increasing, and ever more urbanised, population.

Water is a key constraint, due to inefficient irrigation systems and pollution. Land is another major constraint – the country has around 22% of the world's population but only 7% of its arable land. Excessive ploughing has meant that vast dust bowls have been created in the North, whilst



Animal welfare is low on the agenda in China's expanding dairy industry. These cattle are shackled by short metal chains and stand on concrete floors.

China



Farmer in the Guangdong province tending a variety of gourd known as Cee Gwa, or Chinese Okra. The vegetables are grown on a bamboo structure for local consumption or sale at local markets. The gourds are easily grown in the UK, and can be eaten like squash when young, or dried to be used as 'loofahs' to clean your skin, or dishes!

land in the fertile south-east has been taken up by urban and industrial expansion.

Researchers believe that with sufficient investment China can continue to feed itself, but one has to question what the cost will be. Suggested 'improvements' include the use of more nitrate fertilisers and more genetically modified crops.

Since the establishment of a new social order in 1949, improvements in nutrition have led to a significant decline in diet-related deficiency disorders such as goitre, rickets and beri beri. However, the introduction of a more Western diet, high in fats and sugars, could mean that such improvements in health might be offset by new diseases related to obesity. The decline in traditional farming methods and the increase in meat consumption has the potential to bring instability and even greater environmental problems to a country with such a huge population, but only a relatively small area of land on which it can farm.

■ **Emma Hockridge works for Sustain's Hospital Food Project, helping UK hospitals to buy more local and sustainably produced food.**

■ **For more information on the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust see www.nuffieldscholar.org**

An insight into our hungry planet

A short review of the book *Hungry Planet* appeared in the previous edition of the *Food Magazine*, but we felt we simply had to return to this wonderful publication, as people in our office have barely been able to put it down since it arrived. What a rich source of thoughts and inspiration, what an achievement!

The premise is beguilingly simple. Authors Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio travelled the world taking photographs of 30 families' weekly shops and undertaking interviews with those families – rich and poor; urban and rural – from Greenland to Guatemala; from Britain to Bhutan. Further pictures capture the family members shopping, preparing food and eating together. The photographs themselves are a fabulous and emotive record of early 21st century eating, but also an insightful commentary on the differences that divide our world, for good and bad.

What better way to begin to understand the differences between wealth and life prospects in Hamburg and Sudan, than to see, side by side, intimate photographs of a family meal? In Hamburg, the Melander family tuck into rolls and pastries from a local bakery, with a range of colourful condiments to add variety and interest. Their central heating, glazed windows and ornaments set the background to their simple but satisfying fare. In Sudan, the Aboubakar family of the war-torn Darfur province present their weekly food – two sacks of grain and a few vegetables, spices and seeds for flavour. Their house is a makeshift construction of sticks and canvas; their backdrop a dusty desert plain. In each photograph, the food is the focus, but becomes by the treatment in this book a rich symbol of variety, ecology, wealth and life expectations. More than distance divides these families. But food exposes the connections.

It's likely that any reader would bring their own perspective to the book – it provokes so many reactions, comments and outbursts of surprise or insight. So let's explore just one Food Commission take on the information presented. The authors have been careful to make no value

judgements about the people they include. There is, indeed, no need for an authorial

voice, because the facts and photographs speak so much of the subject. But it is hard not to become aware of the plethora of colourful branded processed foods dominating the shopping baskets of wealthy Western nations. And it is hard not to notice how few of such products appear in other parts of the world, where a plant-based diet persists.

With a wonderful eye for detail, the authors underpin the visual information with facts and figures about how much each family spends on different types of food, including snacks and fast food, and sets this in the context of national health trends, average calorie intakes, obesity and diabetes rates, smoking rates, and the national price of a Big Mac.

It's a bad pun, but this book really is food for thought. We would strongly recommend this for adult readers with an interest in food. It would also be useful for teachers and parents working on 'citizenship' issues, and helping young people understand the importance of food to our wellbeing, family relationships, global development and the environment. Don't expect to see the world of food in the same light ever again.

■ **Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio. Material World Books. \$40.00. www.menzelphoto.com ISBN 1-58008-681-0**



Legal, decent, honest and true?

The activities of the advertising industry raise many important questions for nutrition and health. Rachel Beebe reports on recent rulings by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

X Ski – simply misleading
Nestlé Ski yogurt (featured in FM73) found itself in hot water when the ASA took exception to a magazine ad that implied the yogurt was free of certain food additives. The text said, 'I don't want pork gelatine, aspartame, locust bean gum, citric acid or potassium sorbate. I just want deliciously simple fruit yogurt.' The strapline read, 'Keep it simple. no artificial colour, sweetener or preservative.'

The fruit preparation in the yogurt contained a synthetic flavouring and additives E440 (pectin) and E333 (calcium citrate). The ASA noted that although the pectin was derived from natural sources, it requires a chemical process to extract it, making it unlikely to be seen as a natural product by consumers. Calcium citrate is prepared by neutralising citric acid with calcium hydroxide, making it a product of the chemical industry, so would also not be regarded by consumers as natural.

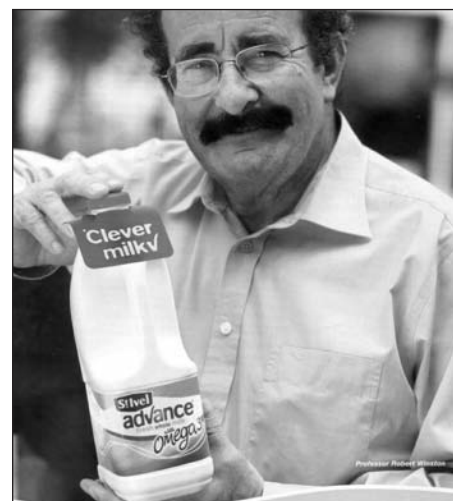
The ASA considered that, because some of its content was artificial or synthetic or involved

the use of chemicals, the Ski yogurt did contain additives similar to those listed. The ASA ruled that the ad breached industry rules relating to truthfulness and comparative descriptions. Nestlé got nailed because it tried to pass off Ski Yogurt as something it is not: natural.

X Pringles is out of prizes
'EVERY TUBE'S A WINNER!' declared a recent campaign for the crisp brand Pringles. 'Win a trip to New Zealand, portable DVD players and millions of other prizes...'

Pringles customers were told to go to a website and enter a promotional code on the side of the can to win a prize, because 'Every promotional can is a winner.' Most of the 'prizes' turned out to be downloads including video games, mobile games, behind-the-scenes footage, wallpapers, screensavers and soundtracks.

The ASA reminded Pringles that the British Code of Advertising Practice states that 'Gifts offered to all or most consumers in a promotion



Want to give your kids more Omega 3?

The most effective form of Omega 3 comes from oily fish, but it doesn't take an expert to tell you that not all kids love oily fish. However, just two glasses of St Ivel Advance whole milk with Omega 3 contain 50% of the recommended daily intake of Omega 3. What's more, it tastes just as delicious as ordinary fresh milk. Now that's clever. St Ivel Advance contains the most effective form of Omega 3.

St Ivel
advance
Clever Milk
www.omega3.co.uk

This recent ad for Advance 'Clever Milk' with Professor Lord Robert Winston has dropped the 'concentration and learning' claims, but the implication remains.

should not be described as prizes. If promoters offer gifts to all or most consumers in addition to giving prizes to those who win, particular care is needed to avoid confusing the two.'

X Not so clever milk

Functional foods are a driving force in new product development, particularly in the dairy industry where it is relatively easy to add 'beneficial' substances to products before hyping them as the latest healthy eating option (see pages 16-17).

Recently, Dairy Crest came under criticism from the ASA for its ad campaign for St Ivel Advance 'Clever Milk', which featured the reassuring face of the TV medical science presenter, Professor Lord Robert Winston. St Ivel Advance contains added omega 3 oils, but the ASA took exception to St Ivel's claim that 'Experts in children's development believe more Omega 3 may enhance a child's concentration and learning.'

So, can the omega 3 in St Ivel Advance enhance children's concentration and learning, or not? Having considered the evidence, the ASA thought the case was not proven. It judged that the studies used to support the claims mainly involved children with specific learning and behavioural problems and that the levels and types of fatty acids used in the studies differed significantly from those added to St Ivel Advance. Therefore, the ASA concluded, the studies 'did not show that omega-3 fatty acids at the concentration in St Ivel Advance had a positive effect on learning and concentration for children in general.'

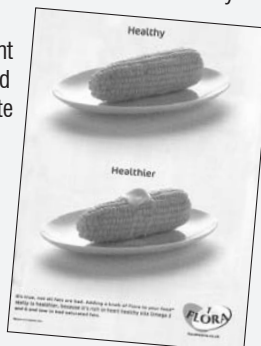
X Spreading unproven claims

Unilever Bestfoods UK was criticised for a print ad for its Flora Pro-Activ vegetable fat spread saying, 'A spread that not only lowers cholesterol but also helps keep blood vessels healthy? What have you been eating?' The ad made further claims that Flora could lower cholesterol and keep blood vessels healthy 'thanks to its advanced recipe that contains folic acid and B vitamins.'

The ASA's ruling focused on the ad's implication that Flora Pro-Activ's potential effect on blood vessel health was distinct from the effects of lowering cholesterol. Although the ASA agreed that products containing plant sterols can help lower cholesterol, they found that Unilever Bestfoods could not substantiate its implication that the spread could keep blood vessels healthy simply because it contained folic acid and B vitamins.

The ASA concluded the ad was misleading and told the company not to repeat it or imply in future that Flora could help maintain blood vessel health, over and above the effect of lowering cholesterol.

In a related case, the ASA is investigating a number of complaints relating to another Unilever advert for a Flora product. The ad shows two cobs of sweetcorn. One was labelled 'healthy' and the other – topped with a dollop of Flora – was labelled 'healthier'. The Food Commission submitted a complaint on several points, including a concern that this ad implied that there is sufficient omega 3 fat in Flora to make a significant difference to redress people's omega 3/omega 6 imbalance. Quite apart from that, how can a vegetable that is already inherently healthy be made



'healthier' by adding fat? The ASA is still considering the complaint.

Currently under investigation – Flora's ad that claims sweetcorn is healthier with added fat.

Ofcom fudges junk food ad ban



In 2003 the broadcasting regulator Ofcom was asked to examine TV advertising of unhealthy foods to children, to consult widely and come up with proposals to protect children's health. Jane Landon of the National Heart Forum questions whether Ofcom is up to the job.

Somewhere in the smart riverside offices of the broadcast regulator Ofcom is a very large pile of letters and emails that call for a ban on junk food advertising before the 9pm watershed. The officials who are currently poring over these responses had hoped to side-step a ban on junk food ads right from the start, by declaring such an option was 'disproportionate' and one which they had 'already determined would not be appropriate' for consultation. And, as they say at the end of the cartoon show *Scooby Doo*, if it wasn't for those pesky, meddling health campaigners, Ofcom might have gotten away with it.

Flawed consultation

It was only when the National Heart Forum (NHF, supported by many of its member organisations and others) took legal action and demanded a judicial review of Ofcom's conduct that the regulator made small but significant concessions grudgingly to 'welcome all representations' on a pre-9pm watershed ban on junk food advertising.

The NHF's legal grounds for challenging the consultation were that both the process by which Ofcom excluded the 9pm option from fair comparison alongside the other three options, and the decision to do so, were flawed and unfair. Under the threat of litigation, Ofcom took the unusual step of publishing supplementary consultation documents part-way through the public consultation period, which took account of the NHF's complaint.

The proposals on which Ofcom is prepared to consult are disappointingly weak. Only one option would define healthy and less healthy foods, which is the fundamental basis for regulating food marketing to children, and shifting the advantage towards healthier products. Meanwhile, all three options that combine different timings and advertising volume restrictions are targeted only at programming for children under nine years old. The impact assessment suggests that options one to three would reduce exposure to advertising impacts seen by 4-15 year olds by between 37% and 39%. This is less than half the estimated 82%

reduction in impacts from a pre-9pm restriction on junk food ads.

Conduct unbecoming...

We understand that Ofcom officials were extremely put out by the threat of litigation. So put out, in fact, that their lawyers threatened to name nearly 150 companies and organisations as 'interested parties' to the case – a move that would massively drive up costs and tie up court time. Solicitors Leigh Day & Co, acting on behalf of the NHF, described it as 'completely unprecedented' and said it was difficult to imagine a more blatant attempt to frighten us off from bringing our case to court.

When Ofcom made the changes shown in the box below, the NHF withdrew its legal claim. Ofcom hit back with public statements claiming that no concessions had been made and alleging that the action was 'from the outset, unfounded, unwarranted and unnecessary'. Ofcom also publicly accused the NHF of misrepresenting the facts of both the regulator's statutory role and its actions. This seemed to us an over-reaction to legitimate pressure on them to take appropriate steps to enable a fairer consultation. All in all, most unexpected behaviour from a national regulator whose stated duty is 'to further the interests of citizens'.

Furthermore, Ofcom has seemed oddly reluctant to engage fully with civil society stakeholders. Freedom of Information disclosures

show that meetings with the media industries and food companies have outnumbered those with health and consumer groups by more than 6:1; a ratio that could have been even more disproportionate had we and other NGOs not specifically requested most of the meetings we attended. Inexplicably, Ofcom has not even sought a response from its own Consumer Panel on the issue of a pre-9pm watershed junk food ad ban, apparently on the grounds that advertising matters fall outside the Panel's remit.

Campaigns and consensus

The litigation has served as a 'lightning conductor' for public debate about the merits of a watershed restriction. By unfairly excluding it from the consultation, Ofcom actually galvanised support for the 9pm option among a broad coalition of health, consumer and child welfare organisations, as well as many parents, as the responses on Ofcom's website amply illustrate.

Concerted campaigning by consumer groups and Ofcom's combative attitude to the judicial review has kept the issue simmering in the media for weeks. As a result, hundreds of parents, teachers and other concerned individuals have filled Ofcom's consultation in-tray with letters and emails of support for a junk food ad ban up to the 9pm watershed.

New research by the British Heart Foundation and by *Which?* (formerly the Consumers' Association) both show levels of parental support for controls on advertising when children were most likely to be watching television to be between 68% and 79% – even higher than the 2:1 in favour reported by Ofcom in 2004.

Already, 114 MPs have signed a parliamentary petition (Early Day Motion) tabled by Mary Creagh MP, who sponsors the Children's Food Bill, supporting the call for a 9pm watershed for

Continued on page 12

What the National Heart Forum's threat of legal action achieved:

- The National Heart Forum (NHF) asked Ofcom to work up a proper impact assessment of the option to ban junk food advertisements up to the 9pm watershed, to protect children's health. Initially, this request was refused. Ofcom eventually subsequently published this on 8 and 14 June.
- The NHF asked Ofcom to prepare a supplemental consultation paper correcting the inaccuracies in their initial paper and making clear that the 9pm option was open to consideration. Initially, Ofcom refused to do this. A supplemental paper fulfilling these requests was issued on 8 June.
- The NHF asked Ofcom to send out the supplemental paper to all interested individuals and organisations. Initially, Ofcom refused to send out the paper to individuals (mainly parents and teachers) who had responded to the initial paper, but on 21 June Ofcom agreed to do this.

Continued from page 11

junk food advertising. A similar motion has been tabled in the Scottish Parliament by Jackie Baillie MSP. In May, the Public Accounts Committee raised concerns about the consultation and in particular the attitude and policy of Ofcom towards food advertising to children.

The pressure continued to mount when the Office of the Children's Commissioner publicly called on Ofcom to reinstate the 9pm option, saying that: *'Food advertising significantly influences the eating habits of children and young people, and Ofcom's exclusion of a 9pm watershed option is restricting a full debate.'*

Soon afterwards, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) concluded that ad restrictions should be underpinned by the FSA's nutrient profiling model, which sets the scientific framework for defining healthy and less healthy foods, and that restrictions should apply up to the 9pm watershed.

Since the litigation and campaigning, Ofcom has signalled its discomfort with the consultation, protesting that its statutory duties and objectives require decisions which first and foremost protect the public by maintaining television standards and a plurality of public service broadcasting.

In the *Financial Times*, Ofcom's Chief Executive Stephen Carter asked whether these sorts of public policy decisions should be left to regulators or determined by government. I would suggest it depends how Ofcom chooses to interpret its principal duty to *'further the interest of citizens'*. In the spirit of the Communications Act 2003, it could equally be interpreted as protecting the health of citizens by curbing advertising for unhealthy foods. It stands to reason, that if Ofcom is in doubt whether it is the right regulator to make this important public policy decision, then it should not narrow its consultation to exclude options simply because they are not comfortable for the sector it regulates. Instead it should consult widely and openly before making its recommendations.

When Ofcom announces the outcome of this consultation in the autumn, all sectors will be scrutinising its analysis and possibly the legal standing of any concluding recommendations. In its response to the consultation, the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising is already saying that it considers *'the imposition of anything other than Package 4 (which the advertisers and food companies have proposed) disproportionate and open to legal challenge'*. In view of the inevitable fudge that is likely to emerge, ministers would do well to be agreeing policy decisions and preparing their announcements now.

■ Jane Landon is the deputy chief executive of the National Heart Forum. See www.heartforum.org.uk

■ Stop-press news: Ofcom has refused a Freedom of Information request from the Children's Food Bill coalition to declare how many responses to its consultations were in favour of the pre-9pm watershed ban, and how many against. See: www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk

Why we need

The charade of Ofcom's biased 'consultation' described by Jane Landon of the National Heart Forum (see previous page) shows how little political will there is to regulate children's food marketing and properly protect children from the onslaught of messages encouraging them to eat unhealthy diets. The Food Commission has watched the progress of the NHF's legal action with great interest, as a test case of how committed our regulatory system is to protecting health. Will industry interests or public interest win the day?

On these pages, we look at just a few examples of what is likely to happen unless the regulators stand firm and put child health first. Promises will slip. Old habits will creep back in. And diet-related disease will continue to spread, carried by the viral-like means of junk food marketing.

Can a cartoon pig threaten Estonian health?

Let there be no doubt about it: Ofcom's deliberations have international implications. Much of the world's advertising and PR industries have their headquarters in London, and UK advertising regulation is monitored worldwide. We might also lead the way in protecting children's health if it wasn't for the fact that UK obesity rates are among the highest levels in Europe.

In the UK, we are used to seeing cartoon characters promoting unhealthy food to children – it is a routine feature of snack-food and confectionery aisles in the supermarket. But developing economies are still in a position to

resist such promotions before they become embedded in children's lives. Public health ministries and health organisations will need to act fast.

We were sent the example, pictured below, by a colleague from the Estonian Heart Association. It shows Limpa the pig, a popular character in Estonian children's books, who is already promoting a brand of lemonade to children – the product woven into some of his adventure stories. Is this a harmless bit of marketing, or a sign of more to come?

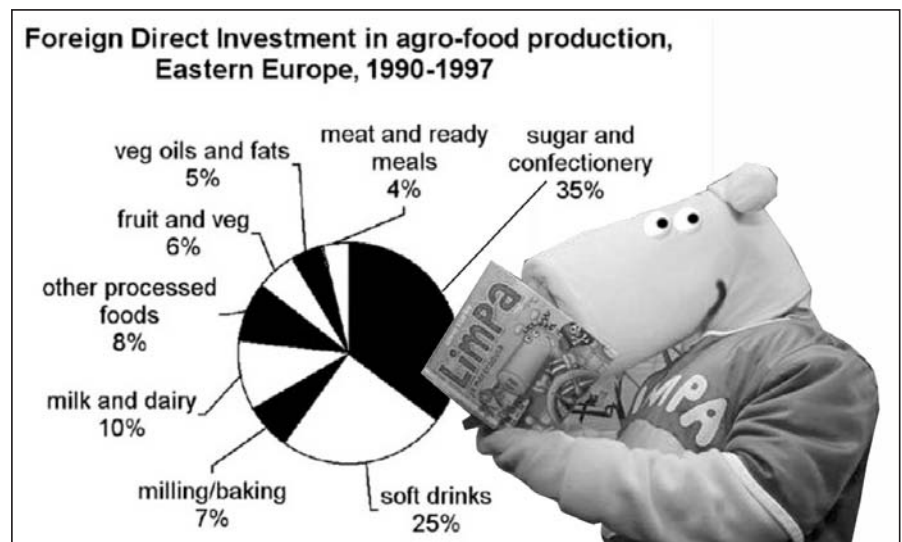
Well, Limpa Pig's promotions are probably paid for by the huge amount of investment going into fatty and sugary foods in Eastern Europe, as the pie chart from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) neatly illustrates. Investment patterns turn on their head the advice for healthy diets – over half of all investment has been going into sugar, confectionery and soft drinks.

We can't hold Limpa personally responsible, but the OECD figures show that, just as in the UK, he and his like are well funded, and without regulatory controls are likely to influence Estonian children's food and drink preferences for many years to come.

McDonald's tempts children with free fries

In 2004, McDonald's made a big song-and-dance about its new Yum Chums commercials, which showed fruit and vegetable characters espousing a healthy diet and physical exercise to young children. The campaign was launched at a time when the company was heavily under fire

Limpa the pig isn't the only one promoting soft drinks in Eastern Europe - there is also massive foreign investment in soft drinks, sugar and confectionery.



healthy regulation

for targeting young children with junk food promotions and collectible toys, and had come under scrutiny at parliament's Health Select Committee enquiry into obesity. 'Think about the things you eat. Don't give us too many treats,' chanted the McDonald's Yum Tum characters, in a bid to 'balance' the restaurant chain's marketing, 'Put healthy stuff in your tum'.

Meanwhile, McDonald's corporate social responsibility documents are full of references to education about balanced diets, and providing 'motivational information' as an 'enabler to make smart choices possible'. Yet what did we see earlier in 2006? McDonald's back to its old tricks. This McDonald's sponsored KidsZone page in a local newspaper (the *Hornsey Journal* published by North London Newspapers) offered free fries to all Kids' Club members, at ten participating restaurants. Membership also entitled children to further special offers at McDonald's, and membership 'is open to any readers aged up to 11. Anyone aged 12 or over is not eligible to join'. Balanced marketing as a means to avoid statutory regulation? Sorry, McDonald's, we're not convinced – not one little bit.

Food advertisers use celebrity mums

Spanish food manufacturers have proved that voluntary codes of practice for advertising can be bent to their own ends. In September 2005, Spain introduced a voluntary ban on food advertising using celebrities and sports stars that appeal to children. Reacting to the ban, some food companies have cheekily persuaded the mothers of sports stars to appear instead!

The case illustrates how vital it is to have a pro-health regulator, to handle the wheeler-



dealing of the industry. The mothers of motor-racing hero Fernando Alonso, the tennis player Rafael Nadal and the football legend Ronaldinho have all appeared on TV ads promoting products such as chocolate drinks and dairy products, apparently showing how well they did with their sons' nutrition.

Spain's self-regulatory code for food advertising aimed at children, (known as PAOS) is an agreement between the Spanish Ministry of Health and the and Drink Industry Federat-

ion, explicitly to address public health and obesity. Industry signatories include Coca-Cola, Danone, Nestlé, Pepsico and Kellogg's. PAOS states that: 'Advertisements cannot use parents, teachers or other people such as professionals in children's programmes or real or fictitious people from films or series based on fiction or presenters of children's programmes. Neither can people who are famous or well-known to the public that are popular amongst children be used.'

Yet Danone uses the mother of megastar footballer Ronaldinho to promote its Danet Natillas product (a custard dessert). Is Ronaldinho's mother not a celebrity in her own right? And indeed, if she wasn't before, does she not become one by participating in such advertising? In any case, Danone continues to use Ronaldinho imagery on its game-filled promotional website, which presumably remains comfortably outside the scope of advertising restrictions, just as in the UK.

Signatories to Spain's PANOS code can be fined between 6,000 and 180,000 Euros (between £4,000 and £123,000) if they fail to comply with the PAOS rules. Whether Danone will be fined for its Danet Natillas promotions remains to be seen.

Coca-Cola times children's access to drinks

Whilst the battle for advertising and marketing restrictions on unhealthy food have not yet been won in the UK, we have seen progression in the area of school food. However, Coca-Cola is showing that even in an area where the arguments appeared to have been won, regulators will still have to keep a close eye on the activities of companies loathe to give up access to what is, essentially, a captive market.

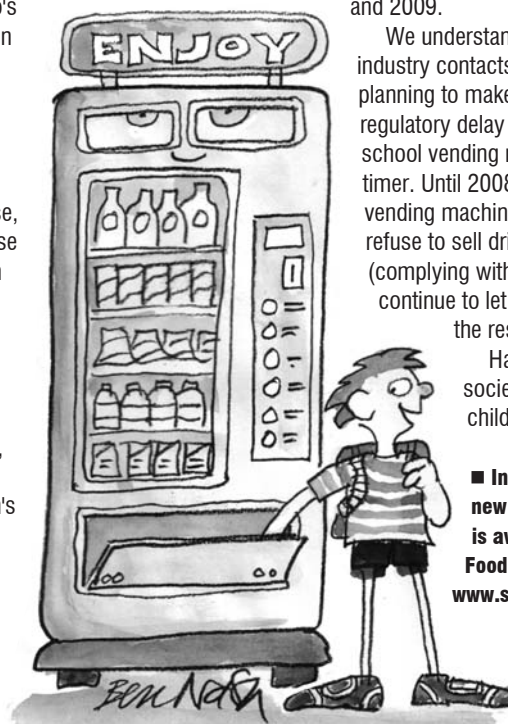
Long-awaited nutritional standards for school lunches will be implemented in September 2006 and apply to all local authority primary, secondary and special schools in England. Yet even here, food manufacturers will bend the rules to get their products into school.

The 2006 rules apply to food and drinks 'available throughout the lunchtime' and explicitly ban confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products (excluding cocoa powder used in chocolate cakes, or low-calorie hot drinking chocolate). A positive list of drinks that can be made available excludes sugared or artificially sweetened soft drinks other than those made with milk. But note the phrase 'throughout the lunchtime'. Restrictions on foods sold at other times of the day will not come into force in primary and secondary schools until 2008 and 2009.

We understand from one of our industry contacts that Coca-Cola is planning to make good use of this regulatory delay by redesigning its school vending machines to contain a timer. Until 2008, Coke's school vending machines will automatically refuse to sell drinks at lunchtime (complying with the new law) but will continue to let children buy drinks for the rest of the day.

Hardly in the spirit of society's efforts to improve children's nutrition!

■ Information about the new school food standards is available on the School Food Trust website: www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk



"It shuts my hand in when it turns off and I get to miss sports!"

Keeping it in the family: When footballer Ronaldinho could no longer be used to promote children's food, a Spanish dessert manufacturer simply used his mother instead.



New techniques for targeting children

As Ofcom dithers over the control of TV junk food advertising, the advertisers are finding new ways to connect to children. Ian Tokelove reports.

Junk food advertisers are switching to new marketing techniques that are ideal for targeting media-savvy children, the 90's kids who have grown up with the internet, computer gaming and mobile phones.

As we reported last year, websites are a highly effective yet poorly regulated means of advertising to children. It is fairly easy to encourage children to visit a commercial website – you just have to tempt them in with some sweet treats. Free downloads such as screen-savers or ring-tones work well, as do free games and competitions. To keep children revisiting websites, marketers use regularly updated celebrity gossip and news, along with games and prizes.

Mobile marketing

It is estimated that nine out of ten children under the age of 16 now own a mobile phone. Texting is an enormously popular way for these children to communicate with their friends, with 96% of children with mobile phones sending and receiving text messages. But it's not just friends who want to talk to these children – food and drink firms also want to communicate with them and do so using text marketing (also known as SMS or 'short message service' marketing).

Junk food companies have made particular use of 'text 2 win' competitions – where promotional codes printed on food or drink packaging can be texted to the companies in exchange for prizes. The codes encourage repeat purchases and companies get their hands on a consumer's mobile phone number, allowing them to text back with new offers and inducements to buy more products.

Companies can also use texting to send virtual vouchers which consumers can then



This 'text 2 win' competition on a bottle of Fanta, aimed at those aged 12 or older, offered a chance to win one the 'latest' picture messaging phones.

exchange for real products. McDonald's undertook a promotion like this in the US, where participants could sign up to receive a voucher for a free McFlurry ice cream.

Chat rooms

A chat room is an online forum where people can chat online. Some are simply word-based, whilst others allow the user to appear as a chosen avatar (a graphical image of a user) and explore different virtual rooms and environments, talking and interacting with other users whom they meet. One in five children aged nine to 16 regularly use chatrooms. As the director of one new-media agency pointed out *"With communities, you are hitting opinion-formers. It's classic word-of-mouth"*, he says. *"Kids are less susceptible to traditional marketing activity, but they respect what their peers say a lot more and this is where they get a lot of their advice from."*



Advertisers can communicate with these children by creating a branded presence in the children's online world. For example, Sunny D rebranded part of the Habbo Hotel (an online community for teenagers and children) as

the 'Sunny D lido', where a virtual Sunny D employee served drinks and asked what flavours the users liked. Controversially, advertisers can also use 'infiltration marketing' to access chat rooms in the guise of everyday users, where they will chat about the 'benefits' of whatever product they are promoting.

Viral marketing

Viral marketing – as its name suggests – seeks to spread commercial messages in the same way that a virus spreads from one individual to another. Viral commercials take the form of funny video clips, interactive games, images or jokes which children will find entertaining enough to pass on to their friends. Famously, when Kellogg's launched Real Fruit Winders in the UK they used viral marketing to reach nearly 60% of UK children, who responded with comments such as *"it's cool!"* and *"It is more secret than text messaging – my mum wouldn't know what was going on."* Indeed, mums were deliberately kept out of the marketing agenda – Kellogg's went straight to the kids with their 'mutant fruit characters'. When mums found out, they reacted badly. Real Fruit Winders later received a Tooth Rot Award from the Food Commission's Parents Jury for being almost half sugar, despite being presented as an apparently healthy fruit snack.

Advertising within computer games

A recent UK survey found that 82% of nine to 19-year-olds own at least one games console. 70% of these played online games, interacting with other players via the internet. And food and drink brands are increasingly being advertised within such games.

Young people can become highly immersed in virtual gaming environments, where commercial messages are placed as part of the routine visual landscape. Crucially for advertisers, online games (a rapidly expanding sector) allow different products and different advertisements to be targeted at specific audiences, thus a 12-year-old girl may be targeted with very different commercial messages than a 16-year-old boy. For example, a virtual vending machine could be designed to have different 'skins' (themed graphics), one advertising 'low calorie, flavoured drinks' for girls, another advertising 'high energy sports drinks' for boys.



Massive Inc is a specialist advertising agency, owned by Microsoft, that sells adverts in video games. Companies such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé and Dunkin' Donuts can purchase advertising using a model similar to that used in television advertising. Adverts can be targeted according to the time of day and the consumer's location, and customised to fit the game environment. This image shows a Sprite vending machine inserted into a highly realistic gaming environment.

Tesco promotes carbon emissions

Back in April, Tesco announced that it would be investing £100 million of its record £2.2 billion profits in renewable energy. Perhaps it would be churlish to point out that this is a mere drop in the ocean of the super-market's profits, when one considers that this amount is around twice that promised by Chancellor Gordon Brown to invest in renewable electricity generation.

However, it seems that Tesco gives with one hand and takes with the other. This summer, in another step in its apparent bid to take over every aspect of our

consuming lives, Tesco is offering guaranteed free fuel to anyone signing up to its car insurance scheme before 5th August. We now travel an average 898 miles a year to get to and from the shops, largely due to the rise of supermarkets and their ability (well documented by Friends of the Earth) to persuade planning authorities to continue to let them build ever larger retail outlets and out-of-town shopping mega-complexes.

Tesco might claim that it is responding to consumer demand, but is it not also creating the need to use more and more fuel?



■ For more on how Tesco influences the planning system, see: www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real_food

Food trade soaks up precious water

Research from the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF) has shown that agricultural policy-makers should be concerned not only about 'embodied carbon' in our food, but also 'embodied water'.

These are ways of expressing the environmental effects associated with different types of food product. Food grown in a heated greenhouse, transported a long distance, stored in refrigerated conditions and bought from an out-of-town supermarket 'embodies' a high level of carbon because of all the carbon-rich transport fuel and carbon-powered electricity used to produce and deliver it. The carbon is emitted at each stage of the food chain, which in turn contributes to climate change.

Similarly, it is possible to calculate the amount of 'embodied water' associated with different food products, and WWF has done just that. The quantity of water used to produce just one kilogram of food is startling, as the table below shows.

1kg of wheat embodies 1,000 litres of water
1kg of cheese embodies 5,000 litres of water
1kg of beef embodies 15,000 litres of water
1 cup of coffee embodies 140 litres of water
1 sheet of A4 paper embodies 10 litres of water
1 glass of beer embodies 75 litres of water
1 hamburger embodies 2,400 litres of water

When he came into office, the UN's Kofi Anan famously stated that *"fierce competition for fresh water may well become a source of conflict and wars in the future"*. A report of the US National Intelligence Council in 2001 concluded that the likelihood of conflict will increase during the next two decades *"as countries press against the limits of available water"*.

Many developing countries now export food to the UK, and are explicitly encouraged to do so, to enter into world trade in food – especially high-value horticultural products. Yet of the approximately 6.5 billion people in the world, more than 1 billion do not have access to clean, fresh water – with some campaign groups putting the figure as high as 2 billion.

Using WWF's analysis, it is difficult not to conclude that developing countries are effectively 'exporting water' when they export food – especially products such as fruit, flowers and fresh vegetables – and at high volumes.

The world has become familiar with the idea of wars fought over oil (even if our leaders say that it is not). But what about wars fuelled by a food system that sees 'embodied water' exported from nations who are also perilously short of water for their own people?

Sainsbury's sells international spinach

If you wanted to see an emblem of the globalised food system, you need look no further than the spinach shelf in Sainsbury's.

In June, our local Sainsbury's sold packs of baby leaf spinach from the UK. In pretty much indistinguishable packs, it was also selling baby leaf spinach from Portugal. And in almost identical packs right next to these were packs of spinach from the USA.

Nothing in the promotional materials, shelf-tags or posters drew attention to the environmental benefits of choosing the UK version. Indeed, the difference in food miles would have been unnoticeable to all but the most ardent of label readers.

The only difference is in the inkjet addition of 'country of origin' to an otherwise standard pack.



UK spinach sold alongside spinach from Portugal and the USA, packaged in almost identical bags. If a customer wanted to buy local produce in supermarkets they would need very sharp eyes!

Spar redefines seasonality

Choosing seasonal food should be better for the environment, shouldn't it? The answer would normally be yes, but it does depend on whose season we're talking about.

Sweetcorn usually comes into season in August and September in the UK – so we were slightly surprised to find, in mid-July, a vacuum pack of

cooked sweetcorn in a Spar supermarket in South Devon marked as 'new season' and 'freshly harvested'.

Closer inspection revealed that this 'new season' sweetcorn had come all the way from New Zealand – around 19,000km away (approximately 12,000 miles), which is just about as far away as you can get from the southwest of England.



Do we need a daily

The British nation's relationship with food is in a mess, with many people now accustomed to a processed, unbalanced diet. We have become reliant on ready-to-cook meals, takeaways and off-the-shelf snacks. With poor nutrition comes poor health, often debilitating at a personal level and the cause of enormous social and economic expense.

Although we know we should eat good food, many of us just don't do enough to make fundamental changes to our diet. Rather than eat more fruit and vegetables and a good balance of complex carbohydrate and protein-foods, we are increasingly turning to foods and drinks fortified with specific nutrients or 'good' bacteria – almost as a 'magic fix' for our unbalanced lives.

We forked out an estimated £1bn or more on 'functional food' products in 2005, and may spend twice that amount this year¹. Functional foods may be convenient and come with a strong feel-good factor, but are they any substitute for a wholesome, varied diet?

Here we take a look at food and drink products with added probiotics and prebiotics and ask if they're all they're cracked up to be.

Probiotics

Ten years ago UK shoppers would never have guessed that their digestive systems were awash with symbiotic bacteria. Yet we now guzzle our way through £189m-worth of foods and drinks containing added bacteria each year, in the belief that these 'good' bacteria will improve our health.

The human gut houses a staggering 10 to 100 trillion microbes from 500 to 1,000 species – more than 10 times the number of cells that make up the human body. From a cellular point of view, this means we are more microbe than

human. And each of us contains a wide variety of different types and quantities of bacteria rather than a single 'standard' mixture.

Products described as 'probiotic' are marketed with the idea that their 'good' bacteria can crowd out any 'bad' bacteria in our digestive systems. However, there is only limited independent evidence to support claims that probiotic products can improve the digestive health or strengthen the immune systems of healthy individuals. For instance, research published by the Food Standards Agency in 2005 showed that the addition of commercially derived probiotic bacteria had no significant effect on the composition of the gut flora over a ten day *in vitro* experimental period.

Research has also shown that roughly half of the probiotic products on sale in the UK contained either different bacteria to those claimed, or the wrong amounts to be effective. The bacteria used by major brands tended to be better at making it through our digestive systems and into the intestines, but there is a big question mark about how effective these bacteria are when they get to their destination.

Whilst probiotics may be of use to those suffering from specific health problems, such as diarrhoea caused by antibiotics, or to the elderly who have a reduced gut flora, food and drink manufacturers continue to market probiotics as if they are an essential daily fix to people who probably don't need them at all.

Just like medicines, we expect these products to make us feel better – and indeed, on those days when we do feel 'better' – we can happily believe that a little pot of yogurt has improved our health. Of course, there will also be days when we don't feel so good, but we can then be thankful we have some 'beneficial'



Actimel seems to want to cover all of the bases when the company tells us that 'Stress, eating irregularly, antibiotics, weather changes and a hectic lifestyle can impact on your body's natural balance'. Fortunately the label also lets us know that 'A daily intake of Actimel... sustains the levels of good cultures that live in your gut, which is where around 70% of your immune system is found.' Phew, next time the weather changes, reach for the Actimel!

yogurt on hand before reaching for our daily dose of 'friendly' bacteria.

Prebiotics

The bacteria in our digestive system need something to feed on. Prebiotics such as inulin are naturally-occurring soluble fibres that are hard for us to digest, but which provide nourishment for the bacteria in our intestines.

Inulin is found in many types of plants, including asparagus, bananas, wheat, chicory, onions, and garlic. Prebiotic enriched foods can be beneficial to our health, but there is a risk they may discourage vegetable-shy shoppers from shifting to a healthier 'five a day' diet.

Inulin can also be used by the food industry to replace the fat content in diet foods. Once mixed with water it forms a gel with a smooth, fatty texture that mimics the mouthfeel of fat. This makes it ideal for use in yogurt-type desserts where its prebiotic effect is an additional bonus to the 'mouthfeel' that it also brings.

Bacteria and business

Food manufacturers use prebiotics and probiotics to make their products stand out in a crowded and highly competitive marketplace. In order to stay a step ahead of their rivals, and as a means of grabbing the eye of the jaded shopper, 'functional' ingredients such as these are just one more weapon that manufacturers can use to pump up sales. Massive marketing budgets (see

Yoplait Petits Filous Plus is a new probiotic for children. It claims it can 'help keep your child's digestive system in balance. One little drink consumed every day as part of a balanced diet can help to maintain your child's wellbeing.' Strong claims indeed – and one sure to strike a chord with protective parents too busy to cook.



Meanwhile, Nestlé's Munch Bunch is marketed as a 'growth formula' for growing kids, containing a 'gentle probiotic' that can 'help keep little tummies healthy'. There is certainly nothing 'gentle' about probiotics – these bacteria have to be tough little buggers to survive in our digestive systems – and there is very little independent evidence to show that children need food containing extra probiotics.



dose of bacteria?

Muller Vitality claims to 'maintain the balance of good and bad bacteria in your digestive system' and to be the 'new must-have in your morning routine'.



table) reinforce the message that these one-a-day products are essential for health.

But as long as we continue to believe that we can simply purchase 'health off the shelf' in the form of functional foods, there is a risk that we will continue our slow dissociation from real food, the stuff prepared at home from fresh ingredients, the stuff that has fueled the human race for thousands of years.

Our bodies require a large range of macro- and micro-nutrients, which are frequently in short supply in modern, processed foods. Indeed, experts believe our typically high fat and low fibre diets may contribute to a lack of 'friendly' bacteria in our digestive systems.

The addition of probiotics and prebiotics to our food, along with other added extras such as vitamins or omega 3 oils, may provide some of us with a small pick-me-up, but what most of us should aim for is a healthy, balanced diet. Despite the promises these 'one-a-day' products, and others like them, simply cannot offset the multiple affects of a poor diet and a lack of exercise.

1 Mintel, reported in Danone promotional supplement in *The Grocer*, May 2006



Dancing Daisy – this probiotic milk promises that you will 'Dance to the tune of life with the healthy daily lift of friendly bacteria'.

Hmmm, I have a feeling it's going to take more than a daily dose of dairy to make me want to dance the day away.

Probiotic bacteria are usually associated with dairy products but now they come in mints as well. The Actimints website comes with an uncredited 'doctor recommendation' that we are 'recommended to take (Actimints) before, during and after a course of antibiotics'.



These Multibionta vitamin tablets are described by Seven

Seas as 'one-a-day... high performance probiotic multivitamins... formulated for active, hectic lifestyles'. The emotive 'hectic lifestyle' argument is a common marketing strategy, which could give the impression that it's okay to skip meals and eat junk, as long as you 'balance' things up with a daily dose of vitamins or functional foods. Of course, there is a very strong argument that you'd be much better off sorting your life out rather than relying on supplements and pills, but for many of us the pills are the easier, if less effective, choice.



Activia, made by Danone. This probiotic yogurt is marketed specifically at women with the claim that it can 'beat that bloated feeling'. The claim appears to be based on a single study of less than 300 women. There also appears to have been no 'control' study to see if similar effects might be experienced by women eating a yogurt *without* the added bacteria – an essential process if the study is to be taken seriously.



Yakult is the product that started the probiotic market rolling. It claims to 'keep bad bugs at bay', 'benefit overall well-being' and

has even implied it can beat the common cold!



And let's not forget man's best friend. Feelwells sell a probiotic dog food which promises 'to reduce flatulence' and 'produce firmer stools' – claims which have yet to catch on in the mainstream probiotic market!



Little bugs and big money

Millions are spent on the promotion of probiotic products

Product	Cost	
Danone Activia	£8.6 million	TV campaign 2006
Actimel brand (all)	£14 million	Marketing 2006
Actimel Kids Packs	£4 million	TV campaign 2006
Yoplait Petits Filous	£6 million	Introduction 2005
Yakult	£3.7 million	Relaunch 2005
Muller Vitality	£10 million	Brand support in 2006

- Figures sourced from trade magazines and company trade adverts.
- Note that this is only a selection of probiotic products. The total value of promotional expenditure in this market is likely to be much larger.

Industry divides over

Will we end up with colour-coded food labels or, as the industry would prefer, complex numerical signposting? Kath Dalmeny reports.

If you were a food manufacturer wanting to give consumers front-of-pack information about the nutritional content of your food, would you use colour-coded traffic lights or numerical Guideline Daily Amounts? The question sounds like a simple choice between one format and another, a simple toss-up. But fundamental disagreements lie at the heart of the choice and are splitting the industry in two.

In the bun-fight over which labelling scheme will be widely adopted, the one question that seems to have fallen by the wayside is: Which labelling system actually works in helping people to shift from a less healthy diet to a more healthy diet? New sales data from Tesco and Sainsbury's suggests that consumer choices change with both systems, with healthier options being selected. But whose labelling scheme has the most beneficial effect in terms of diet?

The Food Commission is concerned that without a clear independent review, there will continue to be a hotch-potch of different systems with so many caveats and individualities that customers throw up their hands in despair and say simply, "I don't get it!" whilst continuing to eat high levels of salt or saturated fat without fully understanding what they're eating.

We can't help pitying teachers and community nutritionists, stuck in the midst of this confusion. Exactly what message should

they be giving to their students and clients about how to read food labels, and how to construct a healthier diet from modern food products?

Currently, signpost labelling is pointing in all directions. There is no clear way ahead. We hope the Food Standards Agency steers a clear road, as an independent scrutineer acting on behalf of the nation's health, but we fear they may be won over by industry arguments (as the news piece on page 3 forebodes).

Opting for one system... or another

Companies are coming out, one by one, in favour of the colour-banding or numerical systems. In essence, colour banding or 'traffic lights' sorts foods into 'high', 'medium' and 'low' for macronutrients such as fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar. In contrast, front-of-pack labelling based on Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs) shows a food's contribution to an overall daily intake of the same macronutrients (and sometimes micronutrients, in the case of some fortified foods).

Tesco is firmly in the GDA camp. The number one supermarket in the UK, accounting for 30% of grocery sales, says its numerical GDA system is the only way, with GDAs per portion appearing on many food products, but with no colour coding – high calorie or low calorie is equally blue; high salt or low salt equally yellow. The numbers give the percentage contribution of a portion of the product to the overall guideline daily amount, and a chart of the total amounts is shown on the back of the pack. No further explanation is given.

Tesco is putting huge promotional effort into winning its argument in favour of such GDA labelling. On a survey visit to a Tesco megastore in Devon, our researcher saw leaflets, television

screens with GDA videos, and even staff wearing T-shirts promoting GDA labelling – Tesco is also lobbying government not to enforce anything that might look like a traffic light.

According to a recent edition of *The Grocer* trade magazine, the GDA camp now includes soft drinks companies AG Barr, Britvic, Calypso, Coca-Cola, Pepsico and Shloer (surprisingly enough, dominated by companies whose products would be likely to get a big fat offputting RED for sugar, if they went along with a colour-coding scheme). Nestlé, Morrisons, Sunny D, Kellogg's, Gerber, Danone, Kraft and Somerfield have also joined Tesco's GDA gang.

GDAs are vociferously supported by the industry's umbrella body, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF). As the representative of companies making a wide range of products, some of which are healthy whilst others are much less healthy, the FDF has appeased its membership by plumping for the GDA scheme that differentiates products only with subtle changes in numbers rather than at-a-glance colour coding. On the subject of colour coded nutrition labelling, FDF's full response to a government consultation was as follows: 'FDF members do not intend to use the traffic light scheme, so discussions on the criteria for such a scheme are not relevant to us. Our consumers will see consistent GDA values being used by FDF members.' Full stop. End of paragraph.

Sainsbury's, meanwhile, introduced colour-coded 'traffic light' labelling back in January 2005, with little fanfare and just a few leaflets to explain the meaning. The retailer has consistently worked behind the scenes with the Food Standards Agency and built up its communications over time. The colour-coding is explained on every pack in straightforward language, with little reliance on numbers. Yet Sainsbury's is getting little credit in the press for these efforts, and doesn't seem to have put the same marketing clout behind it as Tesco.

The 'colour-coding' club is now populated by supermarkets who are notable in having made a particular commitment to healthy eating – the Co-op, Waitrose and Asda. Again unsurprisingly, colour coding seems more acceptable to the retail sector, which sells both healthier and less healthy options. Shifts in sales between categories will not damage their overall profits. Their response stands therefore in sharp contrast to the reaction of snack and sugar drink manufacturers, who are destined to lose out if people make healthier choices based on easy-to-interpret information about the fat and sugar content of their foods.

FSA system 'easier to understand'

Tesco's rejection of the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) traffic light labelling system, and its decision to use its own 'healthy' food labelling system, has confused shoppers, according to research from the consumer watchdog *Which?* (Consumers' Association).

A *Which?* survey of 636 people found that 97% could understand and compare nutrient levels using the FSA system, compared to 86% for the Tesco system. Furthermore, the colour coding on Tesco's nutrient labels was only understood by 37%.

The difference in understanding was further highlighted by the fact that when respondents

were asked to compare different labelling, more found the FSA system easy to understand at a glance compared to the current Tesco system.

Chief Policy Advisor for *Which?* Sue Davies said: "It's unfortunate that several manufacturers intend to use the Tesco scheme despite its poorer performance. We are calling on all retailers and manufacturers to use the FSA multiple traffic light scheme on the front of their packaging so that customers are able to easily identify which products are the most healthy."

The *Which?* report *Healthy Signs* is available to download free of charge on the website: www.which.co.uk

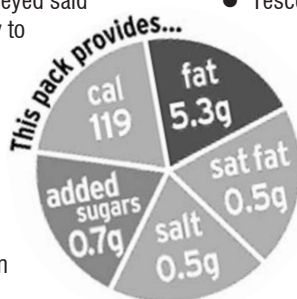
Food nutrition labelling

Tesco vs. Sainsbury's: The gloves are off

We asked each of the supermarkets leading on the rival labelling schemes, Tesco and Sainsbury's, to share with us the findings of their research. Both supermarkets claimed to see a pattern of healthier choices after introduction of their respective labelling schemes, but measured different things. Of the two, Tesco revealed fewer hard facts about the effects of its GDA labelling than Sainsbury's with its Wheel of Health. Here is a run-down of their responses – neither of them sufficient to draw the type of firm conclusions claimed by Tesco in a rather adamant press release on the subject – but both thought-provoking in their own right:

Sainsbury's

- 94% of Sainsbury's customers surveyed said the colour-coding system was easy to understand, with the colours green, amber and red being 'universally understood'.
- Sainsbury's new white sliced loaf, with all 'green' colour-coding because it has a lower salt level than other sliced breads, showed positive sales growth of 6%, year on year.
- Breakfast cereals with 'amber and green' coding are growing at 14% in comparison to overall growth for the breakfast cereal sector, of 7%, year on year.
- 'Be Good To Yourself' healthier soups (with at least 4 greens for the macronutrients) have shown year on year growth of 126% in a category that is 'notoriously salty' according to Sainsbury's, which says it is on course to meet FSA salt reduction targets by 2010.
- In frozen ready meals, products with no reds are growing at 7%; growth on lines with reds is down by 35%, year on year.
- 16% of Sainsbury's customers have increased their spend on more healthier items whilst spending less on less healthy in Bakery, Hot Convenience, 'Just Cook' and Dairy sectors. (Healthy items are those with 3 or more greens out of 5 coded macronutrients; less healthy items are those with 3 or more rated as red).
- In bread rolls and cakes, healthier items have outperformed less healthy lines.
- Hot desserts with green and amber are growing at 42% whereas those with reds are down 11%.
- In cakes, amber sales have grown at 12% like-for-like while reds have declined by 10%.



- Bread rolls with all-green codes are up 16% and amber is up 14%.
- Note: Criteria for Sainsbury's banding scheme is broadly in line with the government's recommended model, but varies slightly.

Tesco

- Tesco vegetable curry containing 25 per cent GDA for fat saw an increase in sales of 33 per cent in comparison to Salmon En Croute, containing 53 per cent of the GDA, which reduced in sales by 29 per cent.
- Finest Chilli Beef Noodles containing 51 per cent of the GDA for salt reduced by 33 per cent, whereas Chicken Chasseur containing 18 per cent of the GDA for salt saw a sales increase of 16 per cent.
- Soup sales increased by 32% following a reduction in salt levels.
- Tesco declared that its own consumer research found that traffic light labelling could be too simplistic and potentially misleading – listing bananas, cheese, walnuts, apple, cola and apricots as foodstuffs that might be mis-categorised by colour coding.

Easy to understand colour coding from Sainsbury's 'Wheel of health' (above).



What is a portion?

To add further confusion, it is not at all clear what portion sizes companies will choose when they describe the percentage contribution of their products to the Guideline Daily Amounts, adding an extra level of calculation if anyone wants to work out what percentage of their GDA they have eaten if they have more than one biscuit or more than one square of chocolate. Here is a quick snapshot of the variety of portion descriptions currently represented on the market.

- Tesco milk chocolate digestive biscuits – one portion is a single biscuit.
- Tesco value milk or plain chocolate, one portion = one square of chocolate (24 per bar).
- Rowntrees Fruit Pastilles, one portion = four sweets.
- Nestlé Smarties – one portion is 11 sweets.
- Yazoo chocolate flavour milkshake – gives nutritional info only for 100ml, but comes in 500ml bottle.
- Walkers crisps – one serving is a whole 34.5g pack (about 25 crisps)
- Taj Cassave chips – one portion size is stated as 28g or '22 crisps'.

Tesco complex GDA labelling (left) shows % GDA levels for individual squares of chocolate.

RED
High sugar

Almost 90%
of an adult's GDA
for sugar in just
one bottle*

How much sugar is enough?

Behind the GDA/traffic-light spat lies another battleground: At what level should the Guideline Daily Amount for sugar be set? The Food Standards Agency suggests 60g (the equivalent of about 12 teaspoons of non-milk and non-fruit sugars per day). The industry's Food and Drink Federation insists that it will not budge downwards from 90g per day, arguing that 'FDF is not aware of any adverse health affects associated with consuming a diet with a total sugars content of 90g. With regards to tooth decay, it is the frequency rather than the quantity of sugar, which affects the risk of caries.'

We can think of at least one major supporter of the FDF whose labels would be affected by a decision to set the lower GDA level for sugar, in conjunction with the new front-of-pack labelling regimes – as our photo neatly illustrates.

* A 500ml bottle of Coca-Cola contains 53g (ten and a half teaspoons) of sugar.





What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals

Reduce energy density to cut intake

Although laboratory trials show that eating foods with low energy density (calories per gram of food) can reduce overall energy intake, this has not been shown in free-living populations. Now a cross-sectional survey of over 7,000 adults in the USA has found that both men and women with a low-energy-dense diet had lower energy intakes (approximately 425 and 275 kcal per day less, respectively) than did those with a high-energy-dense diet, even though they consumed more food by weight (approximately 400 and 300 grams per day more, respectively).

These differences appeared to affect bodyweight, with normal-weight people eating diets with a lower energy density than obese people. Individuals with a high fruit and vegetable intake had the lowest energy density values and the lowest obesity prevalence.

The researchers suggest that the energy density of diets can be lowered by adding fruit

and vegetables, and this may be an effective means of weight management.

JH Ledikwe et al, *Am J Clin Nutr*, 83, 1362-8, 2006.

Motivation is the best dietary aid

A trial of four different commercial weightloss programmes found that all were successful, provided that the would-be slimmers were prepared to stick with the diets for six months.

The four dietary programmes were the Atkins diet, Weight Watchers, Slim Fast and Rosemary Conley.

Of some 290 participants, only 58 completed the trials without lapsing or changing their diets. Participants who completed the dietary programmes lost an average of 10kg or 11% of bodyweight over the six-month trial period, with the best-performing being the Rosemary Conley diet at 13% loss of bodyweight and with 20 remaining participants.

During the follow-up six months, the Rosemary Conley dieters also showed a greater additional loss of weight (typically a further 1.2kg), while those on the Atkins and Slim Fast diets regained about 1.5kg.

The researchers conclude that a participant's motivation to continue with the diets was the most significant factor in weight loss. The Atkins diet showed the greatest loss in the first four weeks, but showed lower weight loss in subsequent months, compared

with the other programmes. There was no statistical difference between any programme by the sixth month, but behaviour from six to 12 months suggests an advantage of programmes based on group support.

Motivation was important, and may have been enhanced by media attention: the BBC were making a film of the trial.

H Truby et al, *BMJ*, 332, 1309-14, 2006.

Restaurant calorie labels not enough

The identification of the calorie content of menu items in a restaurant might seem a good idea but research from the US suggests that this would be of marginal value without greater consumer education.

Interviews with nearly 1,000 community and student participants found that fewer than two thirds looked at labelling details, and between a third and a quarter did not know adult daily requirements. Half of the participants admitted they would probably not use calorie information if it were provided.

The authors suggest that a public education programme may assist consumers using label information, and that simpler labeling formats (eg, representing different foods as 'low', 'moderate' and 'high' calorie) should be considered.

Krukowski RA et al, *J Am Diet Assoc*. 106, 917-20, 2006.

Women get different pleasure from chocolate

Research from the Netherlands indicates that men and women differ in their response to certain foods and the subsequent feelings of satiety or fullness.

MRI scans of 12 men and 12 women were taken while the participants ate chocolate until they were satiated. In men, chocolate satiation was associated with increased taste activation in the ventral striatum, insula, and orbitofrontal and medial orbitofrontal cortex and with decreased taste activation in somatosensory areas. Women showed increased taste activation in the precentral gyrus, superior temporal gyrus, and putamen and decreased taste activation in the hypothalamus and amygdala. Sex differences in the effect of chocolate satiation were found in the hypothalamus, ventral striatum, and medial prefrontal cortex.

The women said they had eaten enough after consuming an average of 106 grams of chocolate, while on average men consumed 157 grams before saying they were satiated.

PA Smeets et al, *Am J Clin Nutr*, 83, 1297-1305, 2006.

Access is key to food poverty

Education on healthy eating is not a useful strategy for the most destitute members of society. A study of soup kitchen users in Sydney, Australia, explored four constructs of food insecurity (quantitative, qualitative, psychological, and social) in order to identify barriers and coping strategies.

Low income, high rents, poor health, and addictions to cigarettes, alcohol, illicit drugs, and gambling were associated with dependence on charities.

Meanwhile, the researchers also found that poor dentition and lack of food storage and cooking facilities were important barriers to adequate nutrition. Meals were missed and quantities restricted as a coping strategy.

Opportunities for social interaction and trust in soup kitchen staff were important motivators of attendance. Importantly, participants demonstrated adequate knowledge and a desire to eat healthful food.

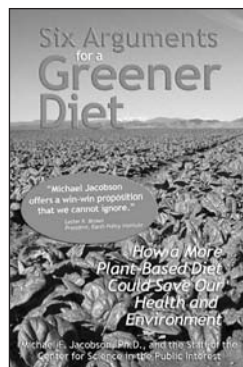
The researchers suggest that strategies to improve nutrition for seriously disadvantaged city dwellers should focus less on education and more on practical solutions, such as accessing affordable healthy food for those without kitchen facilities, improving dentition, and reducing addictions. They add that a strategy should also aim to facilitate social networks with trusted support organisations.

R Wicks et al, *J Am Diet Assoc*. 106, 921-4, 2006.



Six arguments for a greener diet: How a more plant-based diet could save your health and the environment.

M Jacobson and the Staff of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. ISBN: 0-89329-049-1, paperback \$14.95. Order direct from www.cspistore.org/item/SixArguments.html



Americans eat a lot of meat – typically nearly 200 lbs each per year – and getting them to turn vegetarian would be a mighty task, but not one to daunt the food campaigning organisation Center for Science in the Public Interest, whose director, Mike Jacobson, is publishing *Six Arguments for a Greener Diet* this August.

As the title implies, the arguments are based on the environmental impact of meat eating but the book neatly blends in the health advantages of cutting meat consumption – saving your life while saving the planet.

The figures for water consumption alone are startling enough: just a single quarter-pound of beef requires the provision of up to 4,500 gallons (admittedly the smaller US version = 0.83 imperial gallons). The total required to water the grain that feeds US livestock in a year is an unimaginable 14 trillion gallons.

The efficiency of meat production is very poor: it takes some 23 pounds of grain, containing 1,150g protein to produce a pound of lean meat containing about 100g protein.

Extensive references are made to studies showing how eating diets based largely on plant foods, with fewer fatty animal products, can lead to extra years of healthy living. Furthermore, the same healthy diet also reduces the risk of food poisoning while cutting water pollution, air pollution, global warming, and animal suffering.

As the promotional literature says, the book helps us to unravel the puzzle of our food system by 'connecting the dots between a healthy diet and a healthy planet', but it tries to move beyond the exhortation to individuals to improve their lifestyles by challenging researchers and policy-makers with a menu of recommendations to improve the public's health, the environment, and the welfare of animals.

In addition to citing previous research, *Six Arguments* breaks new ground with its own calculations. For instance, for each member of the population that cuts out a portion of beef, a cup of milk and a serving of cheese in a day, replacing these foods with fruit, vegetables, beans and grains, agriculture would cut its use of 40 pounds of fertiliser and would no longer need to dump 11,000 pounds of animal waste into the environment – and all this while reducing the individual's fat intake by a third and their saturated fat intake by a half.

The authors estimate that the saturated fat and cholesterol in animal products are responsible for about 65,000 fatal heart attacks every year. Multiply those improvements by millions of people and it's easy to see, as the authors argue, the dramatic improvements in health and reductions in pollution that dietary changes could bring about.

This book picks up where the likes of *Fast Food Nation* and *Supersize Me* left off, providing a rationale for change that stretches back up the food supply to the farm and the agri-corporations, and down to the supermarket and the domestic kitchen. It owes much to predecessors, notably Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet*, but the facts and figures are new – and more compelling than ever.

The Future of Food

Deborah Koons Garcia, \$20.00
www.thefutureoffood.com

Directed by Deborah Koons Garcia, *The Future of Food* is a powerful documentary about the agri-food business in the United States. It offers a powerful insight into the mechanisms of a modern food production system that progressively relies on genetically modified crops to feed the unaware consumer. It raises important issues regarding the way food corporations behave in terms of patenting, the absence of labelling information and the lack of liability of genetic engineering companies, which are eroding farmers' culture and knowledge while threatening to destroy richness of species and community values.

The film exposes the biotech giants for their lack of concern for health and ethics in favour of a profit-orientated mentality. Monsanto is in the line of fire for bullying independent farmers, manipulating the legal system and harmonising patenting laws amongst countries in an attempt to control and consolidate the global food industry at every level.

The Future of Food introduces the viewer to the stories behind the food we purchase and eat,

and to the government policies that support the corporations. It is a strong motivator to anyone wanting to move towards a more sustainable agriculture.

The Future of Food can be bought online via the following website: www.thefutureoffood.com. Be sure to order the PAL version if you are based in Europe.



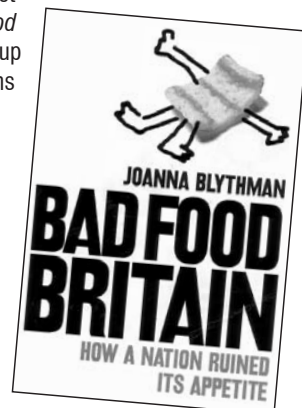
Bad Food Britain: How a nation ruined its appetite

Joanna Blythman
Fourth Estate ISBN 0-00-721994-6. £7.00

In *Bad Food Britain* Joanna Blythman turns her investigative eye on British society, dismissing the notion that we are now a nation of foodies and pointing out that the majority of shoppers in Britain simply want it cheap and cheerful. Blythman argues that as a nation, we no longer care about the quality or provenance of the food we eat, nor do we care for food that requires more than a few minutes' preparation. Whilst we stuff our eyes on 'food as lifestyle' magazines and TV programmes, presented by grinning or swearing celebrity chefs; in our own kitchens we are paralysed by our lack of real knowledge.

Blythman investigates the paradox of a nation bombarded with healthy eating advice but which eats more junk than the rest of Europe put together. In this engaging and entertaining book she takes us on a provocative journey through Britain's food landscape, backing up her powerful prose with hard-hitting, and often deeply worrying, statistics. Blythman misses few targets during her investigation, which covers industry lobbyists, politicians, food hygiene zealots, health food gurus and the modern education system, where food 'technology' is now taught instead of basic cooking skills.

Unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, *Bad Food Britain* is able to come up with only a few solutions to the problems so eloquently described within its pages. But Joanna Blythman does give us the facts, and the ammunition to fight back against the junk food culture. And for this we should be grateful.



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

Sulphites and runny noses

My three children and their father all get mouth ulcers, runny noses and a whole lot of other symptoms when they eat food containing sulphite additives. The medical profession seems to know nothing and are not able to advise or help on this matter. Can you offer any advice?

Michelle, via email

Sulphites are a recognised allergen, used as preservatives in a very wide range of products such as soft drinks, sausages, burgers and dried fruit. This makes these additives very hard to avoid. The most common sulphite additive is sulphur dioxide, or E220. People with asthma can react to sulphur dioxide, resulting in a shortness of breath or an asthma attack. As a respiratory irritant the additive could possibly cause a runny nose, although we are unaware of any link with mouth ulcers.

Preservatives must be listed as a food ingredient and you may also notice 'contains sulphites' warnings on some products, such as wine (alcoholic drinks do not need to declare additives on the label, but sulphites are frequently used, and must now be labelled if present above a certain level).

Other sulphite additives are E221, in sequence through to E228. Whilst it may seem odd to use a known allergen as a food preservative, sulphites are invaluable to the food industry as they prolong shelf life and help protect against food poisoning.

Corrections

In our story 'Peanuts to Sainsbury's' in FM73 we stated that a portion of nuts could be counted towards your 'five-a-day' of fruit and vegetables.

Sue Young, a Community Food Project Worker at St Pancras Hospital in London has correctly pointed out that nuts cannot be included as a portion of your 'five a day'. We should have known that – sorry!

■ For more information on 'five a day' see www.5aday.nhs.uk

Salty chicken

In the last issue of the *Food Magazine*, a picture on page four has the caption '... what is it with chicken dishes? These products all boast 2g salt in a single portion'. The answer may be in the type of chicken being used. I do not know if the situation has changed in the last four years, but there was an EU reduced tariff on imported frozen chicken breast meat containing water and salt. This was the raw material for much of the pumped-up chicken scam, and a scrutiny of ready meal chicken products shows a lot of them declaring 'marinated chicken' as an ingredient, which is likely to be a similar thing. So could it be EU policy on tariffs that is contributing to increased salt intake?

**Bob Stevens, County Analyst
Worcestershire Scientific Services**

You may have hit the nail on the head Bob. In the mid-nineties countries like Thailand and Brazil, in response to requests from European food companies, began exporting salted, frozen chicken meat that could be used directly in the manufacture of processed products. As long as the chicken contained 1.2% salt or more it could be classified as 'salted meat' and was thus subject to a duty rate of just 15.4%, instead of the normal 58.9% duty rate paid for frozen chicken.

This cheap, salty chicken was typically used in added-value products such as nuggets and ready meals. However, EU poultry farmers weren't happy about the flood of imports and in 2002 the EU parliament restricted the imports by changing the definition of salted chicken, forcing importers of salted Thai and Brazilian

poultry to pay the higher tariff for frozen chicken. Thailand and Brazil complained to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and in 2005 the WTO ruled that the EU's tariffs on salted, frozen chicken from the two countries were illegal and restrictive under the body's trade rules.

So we once again have a situation where it makes financial sense for food processors to import salted, rather than unsalted, frozen chicken – even if this runs counter to health recommendations. Recent outbreaks of Avian Flu have badly affected imports of uncooked chicken, with all uncooked chicken from Thailand banned until December 2007, but it is likely that this lucrative trade will recommence as soon as the ban is lifted.

As a postscript to this story, readers may be interested to learn that the supermarket Lidl has just been found guilty of selling mislabelled chicken. Lidl's 'Maitre Special Chicken breast fillet' contained minced breast meat that was only 76% to 79% meat, and not the 92% declared on the label.

Worcestershire County Council Trading Standards officials, who lodged the legal complaint, had been alerted to the watery chicken when a local resident complained that the chicken was 'extremely salty'.

The supermarket had previously been warned by other Trading Standards Authorities about this discrepancy, but continued to sell the chicken without changing the label. Magistrates fined Lidl £12,000 and ordered the company to pay costs of £8,710.

McDonald's is everywhere!

Reader Abi Barratt (aged 11) sent us a photo by email of an item she spotted in July, on sale via the online auction website eBay. It shows a 1:400-scale model of a red Crossair plane branded prominently with the McDonald's name and logo. Abi asked if this was "yet another idea for getting the junk food name into children's model collections and minds"?

Probably so, Abi, but sadly that's not the whole story. This model is based

on a real aeroplane. As far back as 1996, McDonald's boasted in information to its franchise managers that people could take a flight on just such a Crossair McPlane from Switzerland, eat McDonald's on Swiss railways, or have McBurgers served up in "European

ferries, hospitals, zoos, college campuses, airports, and military bases".

The latest we've seen is McDonald's setting up internet cafés – as shown in a billboard ad photographed this summer in a Parisian station, promoting free and unlimited access to the McWeb. Putting their logo and restaurants in so many places ensures that the brand is with you wherever you McGo!



Unbalanced offers

Here is the ultimate healthy offer for children, spotted at the entrance of the cafeteria of Debenhams in Derby: *Special offer for kids: If you buy a Pick & mix for £2.95, you can have a piece of fruit for FREE.* Under the poster was an abundance of containers full of Hula Hoops, crisps of various kinds, cereal bars, Dairy Lea cheese strips, Mini Jaffa cakes and other 'healthy' items. If you buy a mixture of these, you can fish your free piece of fruit out a basket containing an apple and three bananas! No comment.

Anna Maria Bedford, Cambridge

Sadly, your experience is all too familiar, as many parents report to us in their trips to department stores around the country. In a survey last year, one motorway service station claimed to offer vegetables amongst its sweets-and-chocolates pick 'n' mix for children, which turned out to be whole raw courgettes! Bizarre!

Fruity faces and squashed bananas

I wanted to let you know about some inflatable fruit containers that make lunchbox fruit more fun. The company that makes them is also using sales to raise funds for children's charities, so it seems like a worthy cause to promote – both for health and charitable reasons.

It can be quite hard to encourage children to eat fresh fruit – there's so much peer pressure. And fruit can get damaged in transit in school bags. So I found it quite appealing to have these colourful 'fruity faces' for kids to pack fruit in.

The website says that they come in four designs and are made from food-grade plastic. They will protect round fruit such as apples, peaches and plums, and there is a special Fruity Face for bananas. One word of warning though, it does take a bit of puff to get them inflated!

The charities that the money from sales is going to are: African Revival (www.africanrevival.org) who support rural

communities in East African countries to enable them to break out of the cycle of poverty.

Then there's Fara (www.faracharity.org) who work with Romanian abandoned children and finally, the Henry Spink Foundation (www.henryspink.co.org) who support families of disabled children in the UK.

I work with primary school children promoting healthy eating, and this seems like a nice idea to make lunchboxes a bit more fun.

Barbara Mount, Cambridge

■ More information from www.fruityfaces.com



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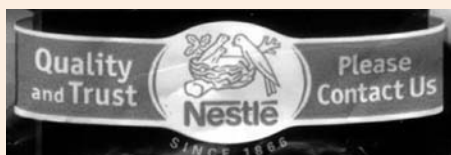
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Good food, good life?

'Good Food, Good Life' are four words that sum up Nestlé's philosophy and serve as a touchstone as we enter a new era in nutrition and health. Not our words, but Nestlé's, from a 2003 management report and thus worth taking



with a generous pinch of salt, especially when one recalls that Nestlé has been the target of a long-running boycott campaign because of its marketing of baby foods in developing nations.

However, the phrase 'Good Food, Good Life' no longer appears on products such as Nestlé's Smarties, next to the comforting image of a mother bird feeding her chicks in the nest.

The new logo reads 'Quality and Trust'. Does this mean Nestlé no longer regards some of its products as 'Good Food', or do we just have to take nutritional improvements on trust? Answers on a postcard...

How many Disney characters does it take to sell a chocolate cake?

It will sound like the beginning of a bad joke, but: How many Disney characters does it take to sell a chocolate cake?

The answer is six, from four different films, but there's no punch-line. These chocolate mini rolls were bought in the supermarket chain Iceland. The manufacturer Inter Link Foods has gone to great lengths to ensure that this snack has maximum child-appeal. If your child's favourite character isn't the clownfish *Nemo*, then they'll no doubt be hooked by *Toy Story*,

Monsters Inc and *The Incredibles*, whose characters crowd the wrapper.

And the contents? Over one third sugar and an incredible 14% saturated fat. *Monstrous!*

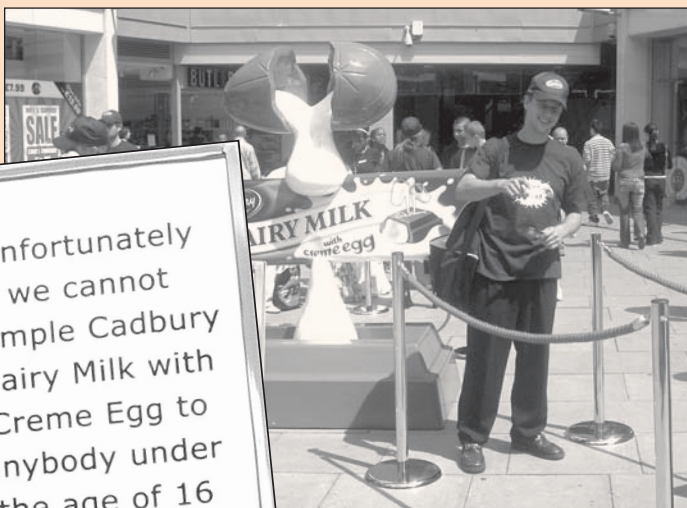


Cadbury's double standards

In May, we reported that the advertising regulator Ofcom had made the bizarre suggestion that junk food ads might be regulated only for children under the age of nine, despite that fact that Ofcom itself defines children as either the 'under-18s' or 'under the age of 15 years'.

Defining children appears to be too onerous a task for Ofcom, so we looked to a major food advertiser to share its own definition. None

other than Cadbury's. The photo shows a street promotion of new Cadbury's Dairy Milk Creme Egg bars, spotted a few weeks ago. When approached, the promotion staff refused to give free samples to children. Their age? 'Anyone under the age of 16'. Thanks, Cadbury's. But why does your response to the Ofcom consultation suggest that TV advertising should only be restricted to children under the age of eight? A case of double standards, it seems.

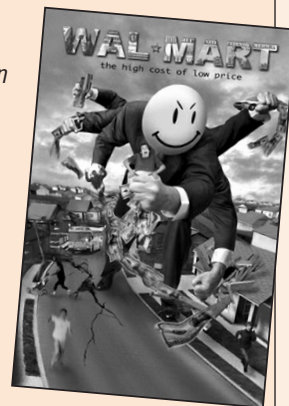


Corporate clangers

Asda, part of the massive US Wal-Mart retail chain, was recently selling an interesting DVD from its online store. The DVD, entitled *Wal-Mart: the high cost of low price*, was described on Asda's site as "an attack on the unscrupulous business practices of the world's biggest retailer Wal-Mart".

Asda went on to explain that the film features "interviews with current and former employees as well as owners of small businesses deeply affected by the expansion of Wal-Mart, this expose of what can be only be described as a corporate monster is fascinating and terrifying in equal measure."

Although it was nice to see Asda being so candid about part and parcel of a 'corporate monster', it is perhaps not surprising that the supermarket has now quietly dropped the DVD from its online store.



For more information on the DVD see: www.walmartmovie.com

One-carrot biscuits

We've heard of carrot cake, but not carrot biscuits. Could this be another indulgent way of achieving some of your five-a-day intake of fruit and vegetables?

Carrot cake recipes do use a high proportion of carrots, but unfortunately these healthy-sounding biscuits from Crabtree & Evelyn (each one shaped as Peter Rabbit) do not.

Hydrogenated vegetable oil and sugar come well above carrots in the ingredients list. In fact, carrot powder makes up only a measly 1% of the product – barely enough to account for the Peter Rabbit's biscuity whiskers.

We don't think Peter Rabbit should test his teeth on these!

