

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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Is ignorance bliss when eating out?

The public relations people are full of talk about indulgence foods these days – the kind of treats that we are supposed to need after all the hard work we put in the rest of the time reading food labels and choosing the healthy options. But, just where do restaurant meals fit in? Years ago, eating out might have been a rare indulgence, but now we eat out an average of three times a week. Not exactly a rare treat what with all those take aways, lunches in the canteen and restaurant meals.

And, who knows just what is in all of those meals? While labels make it possible to figure out the calorie, salt, fat (including saturates) and sugar content of many packaged food products, and FSA traffic light labelling on some products allows for a quick judgements and comparisons about whether foods are high, medium or low with regard to those key nutrients, this type of information is just not available with most restaurant meals.

Most food sold by catering establishments is exempt from food labelling requirements; descriptions of food must not mislead, information needs to be included about a few factors including irradiation, nuts or genetically modified ingredients, but that is about it.

According to a report by Claire Wilman, a Senior Officer at Surrey Trading Standards, “The customers have no idea what they are actually eating apart from the descriptions on the menu. What may be perceived as a healthier option, may in fact be seasoned in salt and full of hidden fats.”

In fact, surveys by Surrey Trading Standards show that is often the case, as shown on page 4.

Surveys such as Surrey’s have tended to focus on restaurants and take aways in the cheaper and middle ends of the eating out market, and evidence from studies shows that fast food consumption is strongly connected to high energy intake and overweight. Restaurants which aim for a higher

spending clientele might not be that much better, we just do not have that information yet.

According to Zeenat Anjari, a food campaigner with much experience in setting up and running restaurants, “Food safety regulations do not require that restaurants keep an exact ingredients list for all dishes – so, a chef some days might add a bit more salt or a bit less, a bit more cream or a bit less, a few more anchovies or a few less. So, a chef might know all about where her meat was sourced from, the food miles, the welfare standards and not much at all about salt or saturated fat.”

Continued on page 4



Pineapple bling

“I call this photo of myself pineapple bling,” says Moses Kibuuka Muwanga, founder of the Jali Organic Association. When Sheffield-based Muwanga inherited nearly 500 acres of an island in Lake Victoria off the banks of Uganda, he did not evict the squatters who had taken up residence, instead he got them together to set up an organic fruit business. [See page 13.](#)



On a chilly day at the Lambeth Country Show this freshly cooked jerk chicken, sweetcorn and coconut juice hit the spot and tasted healthy – but the truth is we do not know how much salt, fat, sugar and calories are in the food we eat out. It would be tough for small traders like this to supply such nutritional information, but should restaurants and take-away chains be encouraged to do so?

A poor explanation for a bad diet?

My thoughts at the moment are with recent headlines declaring that the poor are eating just about as good, or perhaps bad, a diet as the rich – these appeared after the publication of the results of the Food Standards Agency’s (FSA) Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey (LIDNS) (see page 19 for further discussion). The general lack of humility accompanying the abrupt dismissal of social inequality as a factor in diet has stopped me in my tracks.

I had started this edition of *The Food Magazine* with every intention of writing an editorial questioning the radicalism of young people. This was after I, and a few other food campaigners, took part in a mock jury trial at the Trading Standards Institute annual conference. We campaigners were given something of a Herculean task in that we had to argue to convict the whole of the food industry for the way it promoted foods to young people, against a defence drawn from government and industry. And we lost – a jury of teenagers from the Manchester Young People’s Parliament chose to note that although industry was not perfect, many companies seemed to be trying their best and that young people themselves were somewhat to blame for their own food choices.

Who can argue with the middle of the road sense of that decision? A kindly part of me wants to applaud, but the memory of myself at their age is choking on its Big Mac...me, circa 1982, would never have come to such a decision and neither would my rather more decrepit self today. Why cede the ground to those – in industry and government – who control vast resources of staff, time and influence? Keep your foot on their neck, don’t give an inch when you hear their plaintive cries, “We really are doing our best.”

Or else, what do you get...yesterday, companies were doing their best to get children eating healthily and today things are ticking along comparatively swimmingly for the poor...and I am having trouble swallowing that too.

None of the work I have done in low income communities fits with the idea that the poor have equal access to healthy foods. Time and again people have told me of their struggle to feed their families well on not enough cash. People say they understand healthy eating messages, they cook and yet still feel their diets suffer. Many of the people surveyed for LIDNS gave similar information to my rather more informal findings.

The problem is, how do we explain why the people surveyed do not in fact seem to be, on average, eating much worse than people with more money? They are not meeting dietary or nutrient targets in many cases, but the average does not seem to show them in much worse shape than the rest of the population.

So, are those on low incomes imagining that it is their lack of money holding them back from a healthy diet? I don’t think they are imagining it,

I think we are probably just not asking the right questions in the right way. The LIDNS academics are clever people, but they still suffer from the perennial difficulties over methods for collecting information about what people actually eat, in this case taking selected days and asking participants to recall what they ate and in what quantity. At a meeting to launch LIDNS, the FSA noted that they are also very uncertain over the methodology used to gather information about food security issues but do not have any plans to explore new methods.

People on low incomes eat on average a bit under three portions of fruit and veg a day, which is not much less than those with more money. But, perhaps people on low incomes are in fact managing their money stunningly well in terms of buying healthy foods, and just cannot stretch to more unless they get more money. Why do many in the survey eat less than one portion of fruit and veg a day? We need answers to the questions which LIDNS has left unaddressed.

Why does it matter anyway? It matters to me because the FSA, in response to LIDNS, says that, “...Small changes to diet can make a big difference to health so we urge everyone to think about the food that they and their family are eating.” I think the poor are thinking about it, but thoughts, sadly do not fill the belly with fruit and veg. Rather like the miasmists of old, who took some convincing that it was something in

the drinking water that caused cholera, and not the fug of bad morals and stupidity that they felt hung in a cloud over poor districts, those who take social inequality too lightly as a factor in diet and who underestimate the effect of food policies that make fatty and sugary foods cheap, will need some persuading to change their minds.



This little girl loves her apple, but will she keep it up? Just why do we find it so hard to get our five a day?

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School kids not put off by healthy lunches

Campaigners say that recent reports about the dramatic decline in consumption of school meals have been overstated and give a misleading impression of the true state of this provision.

In July, the Local Authority Caterers Association (LACA) published a survey that found caterers' takings down around 30% from meals and vending. The report claimed, "In 2007 the picture is one of considerable concern over the future viability of the school meals service, particularly in secondary schools."

LACA suggests that this decline is due directly to Government efforts to make school food healthier, with changes such as a ban on fizzy drinks vending and limits on fried food offerings, all amounting to attempts to, "convert teenagers to a healthier regime by force."

But, hot on the heels of this report, the School Food Trust (SFT), the body established by the government in 2005 to improve school food provision, announced that they are currently analysing the results of their own survey of take up which will report only very minor declines. The SFT reports that changes to food provision will take some time to settle in and that take up

of school meals is actually increasing in some areas.

Various initiatives are under way to help support the changes to menus, including the lottery-funded, Soil Association-led Food for Life Partnership which will offer schools a range of ideas to boost take up. The Partnership Policy Manager, Joanna Collins, says, "There is good evidence that pupils and parents quickly wise up to the value of healthy meals if they are involved in planning menu changes and able to visit local farms that supply food to the school. There is no better way of getting children eating fruit and vegetables than helping them to grow their own in school gardens and cook with that food."

According to Jackie Schneider, ex-teacher, and founder of Merton Parents for better food in schools, caterers do deserve some sympathy. "Fizzy drinks and crisps made lots of money for caterers and helped to subsidise the rest of the meal, but there is a health crisis and we can't go back to that old style."

Schneider says it is important that all parties work together, these changes are not just about caterers getting their acts together, but schools as well. "Caterers have taken a hit, now schools



The School Food Trust is helping dinner ladies to get the training they need to provide healthier school meals.

need to take a hit – they need to spend money improving their canteens, so kids want to stay in. Schools say they don't have the money, but break it down to a five year plan and do it little by little. Too many are cutting lunch hours, leading to a drop in spend, too many still allow kids to bring in fizzy drinks with their packed lunch and too many do not think imaginatively when it comes to supporting changes."

Kids against cocoa slavery

Chocolate manufacturers such as Nestlé, Mars and Cadbury are not doing much to stop child slavery in the Ivory Coast, so school kids in Tonbridge Wells are taking a stand. Anti-slavery campaigners Stop The Traffik (STT) recently visited 22 schools at the start of a nationwide campaign and showed pupils that nearly half of the chocolate in their tuck shop comes from cocoa plantations that use slave labour. Pupils passed the message onto friends and family, with

some resourceful students even organising a town centre demonstration to highlight the issue.

The STT campaign is highlighting the plight of thousands of children in the Ivory Coast who are sold by traffickers to cocoa farmers. The children are then forced to harvest the crops that are bought by the British chocolate industry.

Campaigner Mandy Flashman said, "The school kids were shocked to hear that in the Ivory Coast children their age were forced to work

on plantations, and would be beaten severely if they tried to escape." An International Labour Organisation report showed that an estimated 12,000 children have been trafficked into the Ivory Coast, enslaved on cocoa plantations and forced to work long hours.

STT chairman Steve Chalke says, "The big chocolate manufacturers are not doing enough to stop a slave trade which they are fully aware of. Nestlé, Mars and Cadbury must deliver a Traffik Free Guarantee by signing Stop The Traffik's 'Traffik Free Chocolate Pledge'. Only then can we know that our chocolate snacks don't contain the blood, sweat and tears of African children."

Nestlé, Mars and Cadbury are unlikely to take action unless consumers hit them where it hurts the most – their profit margins. If you want to take a stand against child slavery in the cocoa trade choose fair trade chocolate such as Divine, Green and Black's, Oxfam and Traidcraft. Most supermarkets also produce 'own brand' fair trade chocolate.

■ For more information see www.stophetraffik.org
 ■ Note: Green and Black's was taken over by Cadbury Schweppes in 2005 but retains its fair trade status.



As part of a community art project based on Fairtrade Chocolate, students from schools in the Tonbridge Wells area produced papier mache Easter eggs. The eggs were used to dress the trees in the town centre. The eggs symbolised the nameless, faceless children who have been forced to work as unpaid labour in cocoa plantations.

A lotta hope for allotments

Manor Gardens allotment holders are continuing their fight to prevent the London Development Agency (LDA) throwing them off their plots to make way for the Olympic Village development.

Plot holders at the site in Stratford were originally due to leave in April, but have now been told they can stay until the end of the growing season – 23 September – when their site will then be bulldozed to make way for pathways, and a giant television screen inside the Olympic Village. Growers have been offered a temporary site around two kilometres away – a location on offer for seven years, after which the LDA suggests they would be able to return to Manor Gardens. Campaigners won the concession when they threatened legal action against the LDA's eviction plans.

The problem is, the allotment holders do not want to go. The new site on offer is on contaminated land, it is further from their homes, and does not solve the problem of the destruction of an historic allotment site, with no absolute guarantee of its reinstatement once the Olympics are over. Growers have been told that cleaning up the land on the new site will cost around £750,000 but remain unconvinced that food grown on the site will be safe to eat. The uncertainty has already had an effect, with some plot holders having left as they lost hope that they would be able to plant this season.

According to grower Julie Sumner, "The remaining plot holders are redoubling our efforts to stay as we believe we have a right to. We think the whole site could be a showcase for sustainability principles, right within the high profile Olympic Village. The new site they have offered us is only temporary, will cost a

lot of money to clean up and we are still not sure that they land will be fit for growing food."

According to Sumner, no one is sure just how much the LDA's stance on this eviction has already cost, with several lawyers on hire to fight their corner against the allotment holders, money she suggests would be better spent on plans to incorporate the allotments into the Olympic Village site. "We are drawing up plans ourselves, with the help of supporters and these will include ideas about environmental gardening, including edible hedges, organic pest control, and waste composting methods. We also hope to reinstate a working windmill as one used to be on the site."

At the moment, the allotment holders must have the strangest access arrangements to their plots of any growers in the country. As the site is already within the Olympic development, growers will have to meet security personnel at the gates, and then be taken by shuttle bus to their plots, with access restricted to those on a list.

This is frustrating, but according to Sumner, "Security and health and safety concerns have been used as reasons why the allotments could not be cultivated through to 2012, newly introduced access arrangements prove otherwise."

■ For further information see www.lifeisland.org



Nobody will be pinching any veg from these allotments, even the growers cannot get to their plots unless met by security guards.

Mimi Mollica www.mimimollica.com

EU slack on tackling obesity

The European Commission's talking shop on tackling obesity – properly titled the 'Platform on Physical Activity, Diet and Health' – has decided it will need at least two more years before it can judge whether it has achieved anything useful. At a meeting in Brussels in July, Chairman Robert Madelin, the Commission's Director General of the Health and Consumer Directorate, announced that the last two years' of activity were, "establishing the role," of the Platform, and that two more years would be needed to, "prove its value."

There was a certain cynicism at the meeting. Two years ago, before the Platform was launched, the European Commissioner for Health, Marcos Kyprianou, had told the press that he gave food companies just one year in which to show they were serious about changing their marketing practices if they were to avoid legislation. At the end of that first year there was no mention of the promise, only an announcement that the members of the newly-formed Platform, which included

industry, non-government organisations (NGOs) and member state representatives, should submit statements of what they had done and what they planned to do. These would be evaluated and reported to the Platform.

An initial review after the first year could not find enough evaluated 'action' to be able to reach an objective conclusion.

Despite such a poor report card, Commissioner Kyprianou gave a press conference congratulating food manufacturers and fast food companies on their achievements, naming and praising specific manufacturers, much to the horror of NGOs and indeed other sectors of the industry, such as fresh fruit and vegetable traders, who were excluded from Kyprianou's praises.

A second evaluation published this spring showed that, of 121 monitoring reports filled in by participants, only 18 had provided a 'good' level of detail, the majority being 'poor' or 'very poor'. The forms lacked sufficient focus,

according to the independent review, and they had too many vague goals and lacked timetables.

NGOs accused the industry of not measuring relevant health-related outcomes – such as changes in dietary behaviour or changes in sales figures for confectionery and soft drinks, or fruit and vegetables – but instead giving details of number of leaflets printed and distributed, or number of website hits. The review also noted that there was no indication whether the activities were a result of the Platform or would have happened anyway.

Now the Platform has extended itself for another two years. Worse, the Commission has just published a White Paper on diet and physical activity which not only recommends that industry should be encouraged to self-regulate rather than face statutory controls, but that every EU member state should consider having national Platforms where industry and NGOs can develop strategies to tackle obesity.

Or waste a lot of time, some would say.

Sweet confusion at the breakfast table

Research published by The Food Standards Agency (FSA) indicates that many people remain confused about the high levels of sugar in breakfast cereals. The survey, published in June of this year, explored consumer awareness of traffic light labelling and their understanding of cereals' nutritional content, with specific reference to sugar. The research found that the surveyed consumers had no awareness of any recommended maximum daily sugar intake and consequently little real idea of whether they were currently consuming too much.

The research found that there was also confusion regarding so-called 'good' and 'bad' sugars, based for example on groups such as: 'natural sugar' versus 'refined' or 'added sugars'. There was only limited awareness that ingredient names which ended with 'ose' (e.g. glucose, fructose) were forms of sugar. Many of those surveyed did not realise that a high sugar content could be due to the presence of dried fruit in what were regarded as healthier cereals, and there was a widespread feeling that fruit sugars must be healthier for you (they are not, but it is better to get sugar from fruit which provides many nutritional benefits, rather than from refined sugars which provide nothing but calories).

As part of the research, consumers were given mocked up breakfast cereal packs which included nutritional signposts in the 'traffic light' format. The consumers were asked to evaluate which product was the healthier, and on what they had based this judgement. On average about half of each group spontaneously noticed the front of pack signpost labelling. The survey found that consumers were often confused, surprised and even shocked at the levels of sugars in many cereal brands (indicated by a red signpost) and especially so when these brands were ones which they had formerly considered 'healthy'.

Some respondents were also annoyed that the 'high' sugars signpost appeared to contradict the marketing claim on some packs of 'No added sugar' or other health claims. One respondent said "I would think 'no added sugar' means no sugar at all."



Most of the consumers surveyed, including those who were not personally concerned about sugar levels, believed that accurate front-of-pack labelling was important. Those surveyed also thought that differentiation between 'natural' and 'added' sugars should be included in the front of pack labelling, perhaps by use of a single signpost for total sugars with additional text relating to fruit sugars. A clear majority also supported the notion that nutritional labelling should be based on dry cereal rather than cereal plus milk.

The FSA intends to use the research to further their objective of encouraging manufacturers to provide clear, easy to understand labels, which help consumers choose healthier products.

Consumers were surprised at the levels of sugar and salt in breakfast cereals. For example, these Coco Shreddies would score 'red' for high levels of sugar and 'amber' for medium levels of salt.

Superfoods will need to justify claims

Food and health are intrinsically linked, and canny food manufacturers know that consumers will pay more for products that they think will do them good. Hence the rise of the 'superfoods' – a term that has been liberally applied to both established ingredients (oats) and to the more exotic such as pomegranate, blueberries, goji berries and açai berries.

However, a new European Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation came into force on 1st July, to

help protect consumers from misleading claims. No food will be able to claim it is a 'superfood' without scientific backing. Other claims such as 'good for your heart' and 'helps lower cholesterol' will also need to be based on good science. The claims will be verified by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

General claims about benefits to overall good health, such as 'healthy' or 'good for you', are

not covered by the new regulations, but in future these can only be used if accompanied by an appropriate claim from the approved list – which will need to have been approved by EFSA.

The UK's Food Standards Agency, which is collating a list of claims, has asked manufacturers to submit all claims by 21st September 2007 – and intends to pass the data to EFSA by the end of the year.

However, EFSA has allowed itself a further two years to evaluate the claims – so do not expect to see an end to misleading 'superfood' claims just yet.



Fake fruit flavours follow the superfoods trend

The Food Magazine recently received an interesting press release from Aromatech, a manufacturer of flavourings for the food processing industry. Having spotted the current trend for 'superfoods', they have come up with their own range of 'superfruit' flavourings – based on fruits which have, "antioxidant power and/or vitamins content, a health connotation and a Latin American or Asian origin."

Their press release tells us that their new range, "meets the actual market trend of more natural & healthy products," but omits to point out that factory made flavourings have none of the health-giving qualities that real fruit contains.

Aromatech tells us that its food flavourings are available in various forms (liquid, powder by

simple blend, encapsulation by spray-drying and granule) and suggests that flavours such as açai ("famous for its nutrients content and high antioxidant value"); pomegranate ("one of the most popular superfruits") and blueberry ("rich in antioxidant, ...also light in calories") can be applied to all types of foodstuffs including beverages, dairy products, confectionery.

Many consumers will assume that an ice cream or dessert labelled as 'pomegranate and cranberry flavour' will contain both pomegranate and cranberry and is therefore presumably 'better' for them. But, instead of real fruit, they will simply be getting a dose of food flavourings and a false promise of exotic, 'good for you' ingredients, added by a cynical manufacturer.

Are products like these as 'super' as they say they are? Both of these juice drinks make 'superfruit' claims – but what will the European Food Safety Authority make of the scientific evidence?

Is ignorance bliss

Should restaurants have to provide nutritional information on their menus?

Continued from front cover

Many food and drink products now provide nutritional information on their labels, so why should restaurants be let off the hook? Surely, their food should carry some form of labelling that helps people make healthier choices? Any such decision about labelling will be fraught with conflict – witness the way so many in the food industry have resisted the FSA's front of pack traffic light labelling scheme. Restaurant meals can be difficult to

tackle; there are those who point to the variability of menus and individual dishes, making it difficult to measure nutrient levels. Others suggest that eating out is a treat, a kind of sanctified space for enjoyment in the absence of health information. Despite the difficulties, there are those who are forging ahead, and the UK can certainly learn something from our neighbours across the pond.

These days Brits tend to sneer at the American diet – for many it is a land of fast food guzzling fatsos, super sizing for all they are worth. But, spin it another way, and it is a country of waistlines fallen prey to the vicious machinations of calorie pushers. Professor Marion Nestle of New York University has produced studies which note that the average per person supply of calories available in the US is around 3,900 per day – nearly twice the

average amount needed. In the UK, the figure is approximately 3,500. Calorie availability figures do not mean all people are eating all of that food but an availability level that high means there must be intense competition amongst food businesses to sell their own products and to get people to eat more. Restaurants are part of that intensely competitive supply chain.

Now, the New York City Department of Health (NYCDH) has decided that food eaten out of the home should carry calorie information and new, enforceable legislation came in this July. The new legislation requires restaurants producing standard portions to make calorie information publicly available and posted on its menus, where consumers can see it clearly when they are ordering their food. The information needs to be in the same size font as the price of the product.

Eat out – indulge yourself in salt, mega-calories, sugar and saturated fat

Early this year, the Surrey Trading Standards Food Team tested 36 meals from pubs and restaurants including Chinese, Italian, Indian, English and Thai style recipes. The team used the Food Standards

Agency's (FSA) traffic light system to give the foods red (High), amber (Medium) or green (Low) for each of three nutrients – fat, saturated fat and salt depending upon the levels of these in each meal. The FSA system does not apply to restaurant meals, but to certain categories of packaged foods, but the team found the system useful to judge the healthiness of such meals.

Overall, the team found that, when the whole meal was taken into account, 16 were red in every nutrient category. 23 were red for salt including seven that would take you over the

recommended six grams of salt a day; 27 were red for fat, with 23 red for saturates. A whole meal simply means the dish you personally order, and are served. See table for examples.

In 2005, the Surrey team tested 21 typical fast food meals and compared them to dietary recommendations for teenagers. Burgers, pizzas, chips, chicken and a couple of salads were sent for laboratory analysis and received poor results.

Eight samples contained more than 1,000 calories and a further four (double decker meal, mighty meaty pizza, pepperoni pizza and half pounder meal) contained over 1,500 calories. A half pounder meal from a kebab shop provided more than 100% of the recommended amount of calories for a girl aged 14.

According to the Surrey Food Team, "It is very clear that if meals such as these are eaten even just once a week, a significant effort is required for the rest of the week to balance the diet. This means either regular exercise or eating lighter meals."



Take-away meals are convenient but Surrey Trading Standards has found that some meals contain surprisingly high levels of fat and salt.

Examples of meals, their nutrients and how they would score using the FSA traffic light system

Dish labelled as:	Meal weight in grams (g)	Fat g/portion	Saturates g/portion	Salt g/portion
Seared salmon fillet, home smoked tomato taglatelli, fresh peas and basil oil	421	31.7 (Red)	9.7 (Red)	1.2 (Green)
Risotto Ai Frutta Di Mare	801	59.9 (Red)	27.4 (Red)	5.0 (Red)
Thai green curry with egg fried rice	709	52.2 (Red)	19.9 (Red)	7.2 (Red)
Shepherds Pie & mixed vegetable	440	17.1 (Green)	7.5 (Green)	2.0 (Green)
Spaghetti Bolognese (Minced beef, tomato sauce & herbs)	759	47.5 (Red)	23.5 (Red)	5.2 (Red)
Lamb jalfrezi & pilau rice	701	55.4 (Red)	13.3 (Red)	5.1 (Red)

Estimated daily requirements for energy for teenagers are:

Male 11-14 years 2,220 calories per day
 Male 15-18 years 2,755 calories per day
 Female 11-14 years 1,845 calories per day
 Female 15-18 years 2,110 calories per day

■ All reports by Surrey County Council Trading Standards Department
www.surreycc.gov.uk/tradingstandards

When eating out?

The legislation is already the subject of a legal challenge by the New York State Restaurant Association which represents caterers not keen to divulge the calorie content of their meals. At the moment, the legislation will affect around 10% of businesses, exempting restaurants with more variable menus, dishes and portion sizes.

According to the NYCDH, overall, New Yorkers consume a third of their calories away from the home and they eat more on those type of occasions. Children consume two times as many calories eating meals out, as compared to eating a homecooked meal; adults eat around a third more calories when they eat out. All of which makes this sector important to tackle.

According to Lynn Silver, Assistant Commissioner for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control at the NYCDH: research shows that consumers, even dietitians, are not able to make good guesses about calorie content of meals. Who could know intuitively that a Burger King Tendergrill Chicken Garden Salad has 240 calories and a Tendercrisp Chicken Garden Salad 400, or that a McDonald's hot fudge sundae has 330 and a shake up to 1160? Her department has also found that as meal offerings increase in portion size, and calorie count, they go up relatively little in price. For example, taking the Starbuck's Green Tea Frappuccino from small, at \$3.75, to the 32% more expensive large version, means a 76% increase in calories.

Here in the UK, there are various approaches being tried, but, as yet, there has been no directive or legislation about this issue. Restaurants are free to add as much salt, sugar

or saturated fat as they like to foods without mentioning it to anyone.

There are various voluntary schemes in operation, including a traffic light system being piloted by Liverpool Trading Standards with some of the city's restaurants. In Scotland, the Healthyliving award, launched by the Scottish Consumer Council and Scottish Executive in August 2006, gives recognition (and the use of a green apple logo) to caterers if they provide healthy eating options by reducing levels of fat, sugar and salt and increase the vegetable and fruit options on their menus. To date, there have been over 500 registrations for the award. The caterers who apply fill in a self-assessment questionnaire but are then visited by independent assessors.

The FSA, at the moment, is sticking with the approach of offering guidance and support to caterers interested in more healthy food provision. Louis Levy, of the FSA, calls this approach a sort of 'nutrition by stealth' and suggests a voluntary approach is more appropriate to the catering and restaurant sectors with their variability of menus and with customers not necessarily interested in choosing obviously healthy options when eating out. Most definitely, he says, "The FSA is not developing a traffic light strategy for caterers at the moment."

Zeenat Anjari, restaurateur and food campaigner, says, "I would definitely not put traffic light or calorie labels on my restaurant menus. Once a customer has chosen to eat in our restaurant, the assumption is that she is an adult: it is her responsibility to know that a meal consisting of foie gras pate, blanquette de veau



In New York City chains like KFC now have to display calorie information prominently at point of sale, or face fines. This UK poster tells us a Family Feast costs £9.99 but does not tell us what the calorie count would be (we're guessing it's nearing the 5,000 calorie mark).

and chocolate cake is more unhealthy than one of pea soup, butternut squash and kale salad followed by raspberry charlotte. But, does she know it all tastes so damn good because the soup is made with copious butter and cream and the squash is roasted in a sea of olive oil with pinches of demerara sugar? Does she want to know, or is that the reason she goes out for a blow-out meal once a week. Talking about the food in terms of just one set of measurable criteria seems arbitrary and meaningless."

But Anjari recognises that this is also quite a difficult area to legislate, noting that, "It might not be fair, but I probably would support some form of labelling for fast food restaurants, whose menus contain fewer choices of food or sources of nutrients and where I assume people might eat more regularly, not just as a treat."

We will be watching the New York experience closely here in the UK. Surely, in this day and age the consumer cannot forever be denied more information about the food they eat out, this is swimming against the tide of work by campaigners to force more openness and honesty into our food supply. If we want change for the healthier, we will need to get on with it, and as Jane Landon, Deputy Chief Executive of the National Heart Forum, points out, industry needs a shove in the right direction, "We know that labelling is driving food manufacturers to reformulate products to achieve healthier profiles (fewer reds, more ambers and greens). There is every reason to predict that a similar effect could be seen in the food service industry too."

Yvonne Wake, Public Health Nutritionist

Calories and cost on this US Subway menu

The Subway chain in New York City prominently displays calorie content of meals at the point of sale as now required by new city legislation.

When information is not so prominently displayed, fewer than one in ten consumers report noticing it. Here in the UK, McDonalds displays information on calories, fat, salt, protein and carbohydrates, but it does not do this prominently at point of sale. It is only when you have bought your Big Mac that you can check the side of the box, or your placemat, to see that you are getting 495 calories or around a quarter of your daily estimated requirement, and that is before you tuck into fries and a drink that come as part of the meal deal.

Displays like this could make a real difference, the NYCDH notes that studies show

Cal		6" Sub or Wrap
560	Meatball Marinara	3.99
450	Italian B.M.T.	4.49
480	Spicy Italian	3.99
400	Steak & Cheese	4.99
380	Subway Melt	4.99
580	Chicken & Bacon Ranch	5.49

Hungrier? Make it a FOOTLONG! Only 1.75 More

when calorie information is readily available, high calorie menu items are chosen one third less often.

How super is



Vicki Hird, from the Real Food Team at Friends of the Earth, reports on the fight to control supermarkets.

I have become a supermarket enemy number one apparently. My friends hide their Tesco plastic bags if they see me in the streets. They close cupboards when I walk in their kitchens. This is funny if a little sad. I do not want to make people feel bad and I know just how persuasive and pervasive the Tesco offer is.

Tesco is everywhere. It has acquired 32% of the grocery market and the other three big supermarkets have swept up most of the rest. Do not get me started on the non-food retail market which is being swiftly grabbed by these huge corporations – clothes, music, books and electrical goods to name just a few items.

How have we ended up with uniformity of retailing that leaves our high streets either clones of each other or deserted but for charity shops? How have we lost diversity of shopping, and achieved more junk, more packaged ready meals, on sale in vast, inefficient sheds, along with

ever more beleaguered farmers in the UK and worldwide?

The answer to these questions lies in several places – in our busy lifestyles and in our cultural and industrial revolutions. But more recently, it lies in the corridors of government planning departments and in its competition agencies. Rules that should be controlling the way in which supermarkets can expand nationally and locally have failed, and it is all possibly about to get worse.

When weak rules crumble under corporate might

Planning policy plays a key role in determining what shops we get. Current planning policy in the UK does, to a degree, encourage retailers to locate in the centre of towns – making it harder for supermarkets to build huge out of town stores. This is because under existing planning policy, supermarkets must fulfil tests including a ‘needs test’ to demonstrate there is a need for ‘out of town’ retail outlets that cannot be met in town centres or the edge of town.

The policy has partly slowed the growth of large scale supermarkets which was getting out of hand in the late 1980s. Sadly, Friends of the Earth’s (FoE) research, in two groundbreaking reports: *Calling the Shots* (2006) and *Shopping the Bullies* (2007), showed how far the

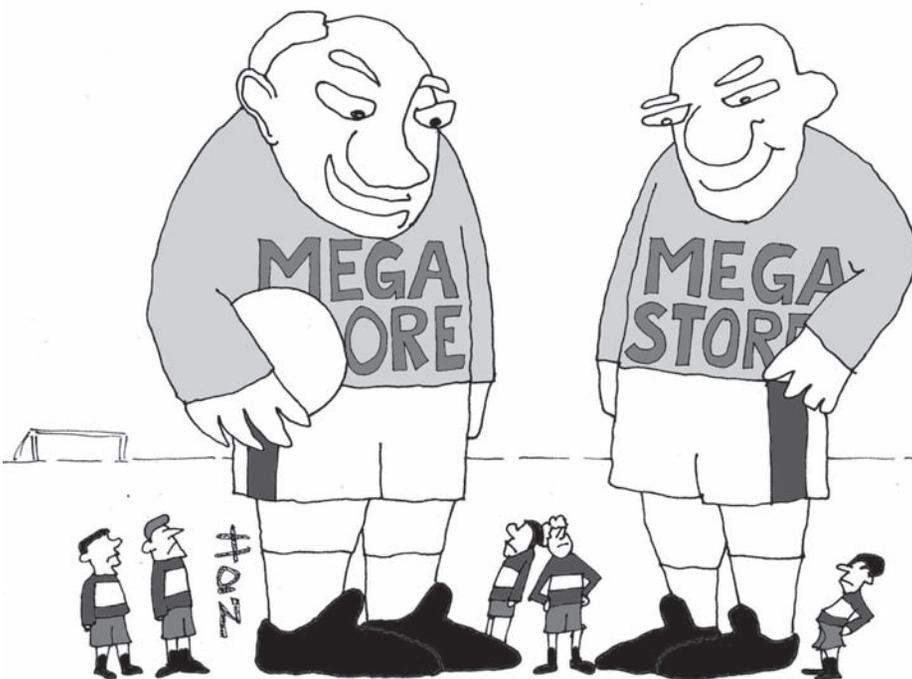
supermarkets can use their might to circumvent this policy though a variety of crafty means. The All Party Parliamentary report *High Street Britain 2015* agreed with us noting, “A lack of understanding and lack of resources have created an environment where large retailers are able to strongly influence the decisions of local authorities.”

Local planning also could not stop Tesco managing to expand its national market share to double its nearest rival. Competition agencies – which should have recognised that this company was slowly but surely mopping up a huge market share through mergers and acquisitions – failed to do their job. In one move, Tesco swallowed 1,200 corner stores from T&S Stores in October 2002 and even then the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) refused to heed calls for it to review the supermarket sector. Earning itself the nickname of ‘Office for Tesco’, the watchdog waved through deal after deal on the grounds that the major supermarkets controlled only a small share of the “top-up” shopping market.

Even the ex-head of the OFT, John Fingleton, admitted that they should have called in Tesco’s purchase of some major convenience store chains, admitting, in March of this year, to *The Independent* newspaper, that, “It is a matter of regret that the two major acquisitions of convenience stores [including Tesco’s of T&S] were not referred. To see the [‘top-up’ and one-stop shopping] markets as separate will go down in history as a heroic assumption that has long since been disproved.”

So, both planning and competition rules have been too weak. These seem like mysterious and dull areas of policy but their impact reaches right to the back of your fridge – what you can buy, where, when and at what price are all affected. And, most importantly, suppliers, like farmers here and overseas, are getting even less of what you spend. As there are fewer larger players in the centre of the food supply system, supermarkets can squeeze suppliers and play them off against each other – what’s called buyer power. This undermines farm viability and sustainability and leads to tales of worker exploitation and environmental damage.

ActionAid and Banana Link have been following the impact of supermarket prices on production and worker’s rights and the results are an unacceptable condemnation of our shopping practices. For example, Asda (the UK subsidiary of Walmart) cut the retail price of bananas, this April, by 20% in an attempt to attract customers



“I see a level playing field over there. How about we take you small traders on?”

that store?

from its rivals. Tesco and Sainsbury's soon followed.

Campaign group Banana Link notes that despite Asda's reassurances that the price cut will come out of their margins this time, this is unlikely to hold true when they next negotiate prices with their banana suppliers. Between 2002 and 2003, as a result of the first Asda-Walmart-led banana price war, Tesco – the main competitor and No.1 in the market by a long way – cut the price it paid suppliers by over 30%, exactly in line with the retail price cut.

Banana Link research, with plantation workers and their unions, shows that the series of price cuts coincided with reduced real wages, longer working days and more insecure employment.

According to Banana Link, that is confirmed by one supplier plantation, "At least 40% of our financial troubles can be attributed directly to lower prices from our UK buyer;" another stated, "We – our company and our workers – are the ones paying the cost of your price wars."

Ironically, the banana price wars are used to show how cut throat competition is at the heart of the UK supermarket scene – yes, but who benefits? Tesco Chief Executive, Sir Terry Leahy, gets a huge pay packet and South African fruit pickers cannot earn a living wage. Go figure.

The time is ripe for change

We have two opportunities to make changes.

A new Planning White Paper was launched in June 2007. As currently framed, this is not good news. The needs test in the original planning guidance provides necessary protection for vital and diverse retailing in town. Without it, there would be no adequate checks on the big retailers, resulting in more local shop closures, less choice for the local consumer and more car-based shopping. The Planning White Paper being consulted on now proposes not only reducing people's rights in the planning system, but specifically it proposes removing the needs test. There is a real risk that we will end up with further eroding choice and with just having multiples to choose from when we shop. So we need to tell the Department of Communities and Local Government that they need to re-think.

The Competition Commission (CC) started investigating the groceries market in the UK in 2006 (following a request by FoE to the OFT in 2004) and is due to report its findings in April 2008. Some of the major questions the Commission will address are:

- do supermarkets treat farmers and suppliers fairly?
- is supermarket dominance in local areas leading to the loss of local shops?

- has market leader Tesco become too dominant?

The CC has the power to:

- impose strict rules on how supermarkets treat their suppliers like farmers here and overseas
- protect local shops from predatory pricing practices
- reduce a supermarket's market share by forcing them to sell stores or land.

However, the Commission will not act until it has enough evidence that supermarket power is detrimental to farmers, workers, communities and the environment and it is confident that there is public and political support to effectively regulate UK supermarkets. So it needs to hear from anyone who feels there is a problem and that means consumers as well as shopkeepers and farmers.

What FoE is looking for is a major shift in the market so we have a real diversity in shops – so people can shop from a variety of outlets and so farmers have a variety of outlets to sell to. And so that my friends will feel good when they see me, of course.

■ **Check out actions you can take on planning and competition at www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real_food/index.html**

Local stores under threat

The Mediterranean store, in Streatham, south London, sells a wide range of fruit and vegetables and other products including many not found in the supermarket chains. At the Mediterranean, you can buy cucumber pickles in the barrel, loads of different types of pulses,

beans, nuts and grains. Next door is the halal butcher with onsite bakery. Just down the road is the greengrocer shop that sells fresh, wild mushrooms picked in the UK, a wide range of salad leaves grown in the UK, fresh beetroot, radishes and tomatoes of different colours. The

stores are much appreciated by the local community, many of whom could not believe it when the Sainsbury's opened right, smack next door to the Mediterranean less than a year ago. Local resident James Postgate says, "Living here on Brixton Hill we actually do have local food stores and farmers' markets. It is a short walk up to Streatham and we enjoy buying from local food

businesses, the Mediterranean is fantastic. But, over recent years, Lambeth Council just keeps letting more and more supermarket chains open shops. We just do not need any more and we are really afraid that our local shops and markets might not survive."

As for the owner of the Mediterranean, he says, "The new Sainsbury's has already made things harder for us, but we are sticking to the products we know we do well, and we also have very loyal customers. One lady told us, when we first arrived, that she thought we must have been sent by God, she was so pleased with our produce. The Sainsbury's is a slap in the face to us after years of work and Lambeth Council has been completely unsupportive."

He also comments that it is very hard to compete with the Sainsbury's on price, and is worried by rumours that the Council may allow a Tesco to be built nearby.



The Mediterranean – locals want to know why Lambeth Council recently allowed a branch of Sainsbury's to open next door.

Farmers finding new markets

Jessica Mitchell meets Somerset farming families who are wary of the supermarket way of doing business.

A new Morrisons store has opened in Wincanton in Somerset, and local farmers are not happy about the clear threat they say it poses to their businesses. Ruth Kimber is Chair of the National Farmers Union (NFU) for Somerset, and her family has been at Barrow Lane Farm, near Bruton, for generations. The family's dairy herd is central to their business, but they also produce 'welfare friendly' veal, raw milk and cream, free range turkeys and have set up a new farm shop selling local products.

"Dairy is a loss leader, Morrisons sell milk cheaply to get people in the door. Dairy is a difficult business anyway, ten years ago we were getting 26p a pint and now we get 18p. Farmers are fragmented and we get picked off one by one; milk has a six day life, but on the farm it has a life of about one day because we just cannot store it, so we do not have much room to negotiate. Local farmers around here will do worse because of the new shop and because of the power of the multiples overall," says Kimber.

Another Somerset dairy farmer, Claude Wadman, keeps the Wisteria Herd – around 200 Jersey cows – on Elliscombe Farm near Wincanton. He and his wife started out small over thirty years ago, and now his son lives and works

alongside them. Although the farm produces milk in large quantities, he does not sell to the multiples. His wife says, "I would not sell to them and I wouldn't shop at those stores either."

Wadman's real passion is for producing raw milk and cream, a small part of his business, and not a hobby that is easy, or that earns him much money – a full litre sells for just 80p. My children drank it and begged for more – they said it was like having dessert. Strict food safety regulations mean he cannot sell the milk anywhere other than the farm; the cream sells at some local village shops and markets within a short distance of the farm.

His wife says he is, "Mad for keeping it up," as it is such hard work and earns so little money. But, it is just the kind of artisan product that we cannot buy in supermarkets and which surely showcases the individual talents of UK farmers.

Although we hear so much more now about local food production and sales, it is not easy for all of those farmers out there trying to diversify, and buck the system. Both farmers we spoke to are also sceptical of claims by major supermarkets about their financial support for local producers, including Tesco's recent Local Choice Milk campaign.

According to Ruth Kimber, "The NFU is looking at setting up groups to support those



who don't sell to supermarkets. I am a food producer, now I am supposed to be an expert in business. It was hard for me to do the research and get the advice I needed to set up the farm shop and I think other farmers are in the same position."

She does have some hope for the future as, "30-40% of all of food sold in this country is still sold outside of big supermarkets, there are around 4,000 farm shops. The reason we have got local food is because people are fed up with being taken to the cleaners over their basic contracts. Once you are in the payroll of supermarkets they start turning the screws."



Milking time for the Wisteria Jersey herd at Elliscombe Farm in Somerset

The South Somerset Food Festival showcases local food producers (22 September – 7 October 2007). The full list of events can be viewed at www.southsomersetfoodfestival.com or phone the Yeovil Heritage and Visitor Information Centre on 01935 845946.



Free range pigs can be viewed at the Orchard Old Spots farm as part of the South Somerset Food Festival.

The soft sell?

We do not expect ice creams and ice lollies to be healthy – after all, they are basically a frozen, sugary treat, but what is really in them?

We checked out the ice creams and lollies available on a typical high street. The ingredients list of such products, displayed at a type size that is almost impossible to read, can reveal an abundance of unexpected ingredients and food additives. As with many other foods and drinks, modern food technology enables manufacturers to turn cheap, unfamiliar and highly processed ingredients into products which, on the face of it, appear to be made from fresh and familiar ingredients.

Rather than use fresh, whole milk or cream, ice cream manufacturers are now likely to use water and combinations of skimmed milk powders, hydrolysed milk proteins, whey solids and vegetable fat. The fat provides a 'creamy' taste and texture and is a lot cheaper than adding fat in the form of dairy cream. The milk powders, proteins and whey solids are easier to store than liquid milk and have a much longer shelf life, which makes them attractive to manufacturers who need to work with bulk quantities.

Sugar is still added to the mix, but often in unfamiliar ways. Sucrose (household sugar) is extracted from sugar cane or sugar beet, but glucose, fructose, glucose-fructose syrup and corn syrup are derived from highly processed starches. Another sugar, lactose, is extracted from whey, which is a by-product of cheese production. The sugars do not just add sweetness and calories, they are also important in creating and maintaining the right sensory qualities – something which artificial sweeteners cannot do. This is why even a 'low calorie' ice cream like Skinny Cow Triple Chocolate contains almost three teaspoons of sugar.

Salt isn't something which you would expect to find in an ice cream, but it seems some manufacturers just can't help adding a pinch to their products. We found it in Feast, Cornetto and Snickers Ice Cream.

Holding it all together

Traditional dairy ice cream is made from three principle ingredients: cream and/or whole milk, sugar and egg yolks, with additional flavourings such as vanilla or strawberries. The egg yolks contain proteins which act as emulsifiers, and

these prevent the dairy fats from clogging together and separating from the rest of the mixture. Rather than use eggs, most ice cream manufacturers use food additives, including: E471 (mono- and di-glycerides of fatty acids); E442 (ammonium phosphatides); E476 (polyglycerol esters of polycondensed fatty acids) and E322 (lecithins). Although lecithins occur naturally in egg yolk, most lecithins are now produced from soya, which may or may not have been genetically modified. E471 and E476 can be obtained by the processing of glycerol, which is increasingly produced as a by-product during the manufacture of bio-diesel fuel from plant crops.

Along with emulsifiers, additives known as stabilisers are also needed. Stabilisers prevent the separation of ingredients (such as water and fat), improving a product's appearance and prolonging its shelf life. In the ice creams we looked at we found: E401 (sodium alginate); E407 (carrageenan); E410 (locust bean gum); E412 (guar gum) and E417 (tara gum). All of these additives are derived from natural sources, such as algae, seaweed and other plants.

What is your favourite flavour?

Flavourings are widely used additives which mimic the flavours and aromas of real ingredients. Food manufacturers can choose from thousands of flavourings to pep up the taste of their products. Manufacturers save money because they do not have to purchase real ingredients like fruit, but consumers lose out because the flavourings have no real nutritional value. There is also a real danger that the over-use of flavourings can make nutritious, home made food seem dull and insipid when compared to highly flavoured, processed foods.

Flavourings are not listed as separate ingredients so it is impossible to know which ones, or how many, have been added to a product. We found flavourings in almost all of the ice creams we looked at.

Getting the colour right

Ice cream and lolly manufacturers have been quick to heed the public's preference for 'natural' colourings rather than artificial colourings, and most of the products we looked at had been coloured using plant derived additives such as E100 (curcumin); E160(b) (annatto); E160(a) (beta-carotene) and E162 (beetroot red).

Dairy ice cream

Ice cream can only be described as 'dairy' ice cream if it contains no fat other than dairy fat, obtained from milk. However, most ice creams contain added vegetable fat (which is cheaper than dairy fat) so they cannot be described as 'dairy' ice cream.

Ice cream also doesn't need to contain any actual cream. It might be better described as 'frozen dairy by-products and vegetable oil' – but that probably would not sell quite as well.



Rowntrees Fruit Pastil Lollies – previously coloured with a range of contentious azo dyes – are now free of artificial colourings. Many products make a point of declaring 'no artificial colours or flavours' in a bid to attract the consumer's eye.

Preservatives

Frozen ice creams and lollies are unlikely to need any additional preservatives. The low temperatures at which they are kept prevents spoilage. However, Ribena have managed to squeeze two preservatives into their Blackcurrant Ice Lollies – E211 (Sodium Benzoate) and E223 (Sodium Metabisulphite).

Sweets on a stick

Confectionery manufacturers have recently made a major incursion into the traditional ice cream and lolly market – introducing new frozen variants based on familiar brands such as Galaxy, Cadbury, Mars, Snickers, Maltesers and Rowntrees. So if you are looking for hefty doses of frozen vegetable fat, milk by-products and sugar, held together with additives and stuck on a stick, there is now more choice than ever!

■ Ian Tokelove



Food production must support and the environment

In 2006, eight million tonnes of cows were slaughtered and over 32 million litres of milk were produced in the 27 member states of the European Union (EU). Beef and dairy are core elements of UK and European diets, with beef being the most commonly consumed meat in Western Europe. While these are important sources of protein and some micronutrients, beef and dairy are also among the principal sources of saturated fat in people's diets.

Support for agriculture and food production accounts for almost half of the EU's annual budget of £500 billion. This Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has had a huge impact on food availability and what is eaten in the UK, with mixed effects on the health of consumers and the environment. Heart health charity, Heart of Mersey (HoM) is actively lobbying for the CAP to include public health objectives which focus on the health of consumers.

Heart of Mersey chair, Christopher Birt says, "Two thirds of the milk produced in the EU is used in processed foods in the form of butter and cheese. This is reflected in what consumers eat. The national dietary survey has shown that pizzas, biscuits, buns and pastries are major sources of saturated fat for people in the UK, alongside beef and dairy products. Most people are eating far more saturated fat than recommended and this is contributing to the major health problems we are experiencing today

Is the Common Agricultural Policy helping to make us fat and unhealthy? Modi Mwatsuma reports.

like obesity, coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes."

The CAP was originally set up after the Second World War to increase agricultural production and ensure the availability of supplies. By linking monetary subsidies to production, it encouraged farmers to maximise their outputs leading to the creation of beef and butter mountains and milk and wine lakes.

Agricultural production has a significant impact on the environment. Cows produce methane and other greenhouse gases from their digestion and waste. The gases produced by cows and other smaller livestock damage the ozone layer and significantly contribute to global warming, accounting for 10% of the greenhouse gasses produced in Europe.

The method used to produce cattle can have a major influence on the amount of greenhouse gasses produced by those animals. The vast majority of cows in Europe are raised on commercial feeds produced from maize and agricultural by-products specifically for intensive farming. Animals are confined to 'feedlots' in

order to fatten them up quickly and maximise capacity. However, these intensive farming methods are damaging because they result in:

- more harmful gas emissions per unit of land
- animal health problems – generated from being in close proximity to each other and the large quantities of manure created
- wider environmental effects due to high fertiliser requirements for maize and feed production
- tax payers pay twice, firstly through subsidies for corn production which can then be used for cattle feed, and secondly through subsidies for beef and dairy production.

Grass-feeding is a healthier, more environmentally friendly method of cattle production. Cows are allowed to graze on open pastures. It has been estimated that switching from concentrated production methods to grass-feeding could reduce gas emissions by up to 40%, reduce soil erosion by 50-80% and reduce the fuel required to produce and transport grains for animal feeds.

James Blair, who runs Whitfield organics farm in Gloucestershire, switched to grass-fed cattle production around ten years ago. The BSE outbreak in the UK made him realise that feeding cows commercial feeds was unnecessary so he made the switch to natural grass-feeding. He says, "The animals are healthier, grass feeding is very much less intensive. My animals are outside most of the year and in the winter I feed them hay and silage. The cost input is low because I don't spend money on feeds and vets."

Blair sells 70% of his Aberdeen Angus breed of cattle through farmers' markets and his website, but does not supply supermarkets. He said a recent local survey found his beef to be cheaper than the finest non-organic beef sold in Sainsbury's nine out of ten times. He put this down to the fact that he cuts out the middle-man by selling directly to the public.

Evidence from studies suggests that grass-fed cattle produce beef with less fat, which is also better for health. Beef from grass-fed cattle is highly regarded for its flavour. As grass-farmer Blair says, "The thing I hear most from my customers is that my beef tastes like beef is supposed to."

However, despite the environmental and health benefits, few farmers in the UK and Europe currently raise cattle predominantly on grass. This is because only certain breeds such as Aberdeen Angus and Scottish Highland cows do well on grass and there is little support from the CAP for farmers wishing to make the change.

Cattle confined in a feedlot in Europe



US farm policy – corn in everything

Jean Snedegar reports from West Virginia on the new US Farm Bill.

Christopher Birt from HoM says, “Although the Common Agricultural Policy now recognises the importance of environmentally friendly agriculture, just 5% of the budget is dedicated to supporting and encouraging farmers to look after the environment. There are no dedicated objectives or funds to support nutrition and public health within the budget.”

Heart of Mersey would like to see the following health objectives included in the CAP:

- incentives for health-promoting and environmentally friendly agriculture such as more support for farmers to switch to grass-fed cattle production and to grow fruit and vegetables
- health impact assessments of all CAP policies
- consumer campaigns which promote healthy produce and raise awareness of important links between food production, health and the environment.

Although today’s consumers are interested in where their food comes from and how it affects their health, general awareness on links between agriculture, the environment and health remains low. Heart of Mersey recently met with the Commissioners who head the Agriculture and Health departments in the European Commission – the main administrative body in the EU – as part of its strategy to lobby for health-promoting changes to the CAP. The EU will be undertaking a review of Europe’s agricultural policy in 2008, with a view to make it more market-driven in future. Ultimately they want consumers to determine what food is produced and how it is produced in Europe. But, consumers will need to be supported if they are to make informed decisions.

■ **Modi Mwatsuma, Food and Health Programme Manager at Heart of Mersey**

■ **The report, *A CAP on Health?* is available at www.fph.org.uk**

The Big Food Debate

On 18th October 2007, The Big Food Debate – a ground-breaking, national conference – takes place in Liverpool. The event aims to provide a platform for experts and professionals to debate and discuss current issues in the field of public health nutrition.



More information at www.heartofmersey.org.uk

Inside my local Kroger supermarket in West Virginia, fresh sweet corn is in season. It’s not like the ‘Silver Queen’ my family used to buy from a local farmer when I was a child, but at least it tastes good this time of year.

But, as I walk around the supermarket, nearly every product I pass contains corn. In the meat coolers it’s corn-fed beef and corn-fed pork. Next to that is corn-fed chicken and corn-fed turkey. Even some of the farmed fish is corn-fed. In the dairy section too, milk, butter, yoghurt and cheese are from corn-fed cows, and eggs from corn-fed chickens.

Astonishingly, there is even more corn in the centre aisles where the processed foods are. Sauces and dressings, breads and baking ingredients, cereals and cakes, cookies and candy bars, juices and soda, beer and ice cream are all sweetened with high fructose corn syrup and thickened with corn starch. According to the writer Michael Pollan, of the 45,000 items in the average American supermarket, one in four contain corn or a corn by-product.

How did we get so much corn in our food? It’s been rising since the Second World War, but dramatically since the 1970s when American farm policy – in some ways similar to the European Common Agricultural Policy – began to encourage high-yields of cheap, staple grains like corn, wheat and soya beans. Producing cheap food for its citizens has been the aim of many governments, but many people believe this policy has fuelled a national obesity epidemic, especially among poor Americans.

Adam Drewnowski, an epidemiologist at the University of Washington in Seattle, has been researching the relationship between poverty and obesity.

“The diet we have is becoming increasingly cheaper, but it’s becoming nutrient-poor. When you’re looking for calories per dollar, or per Euro, or per £, it’s actually very difficult to beat sugar. Sugar gives you the most calories per dollar, and sugar made from corn is actually cheaper still, so it’s really a question of economics. So we are spending less and less money to feed ourselves every day, but we are increasingly getting empty calories.”

Drewnowski says the problem is concentrated in lower income states and lower income neighbourhoods. “In New York City, obesity quadruples the moment you go from the Upper East



Corn starches and syrups will have been used to thicken and sweeten almost every sauce, dressing and condiment stocked in this US supermarket aisle.

Side to East Harlem. Healthier foods not only cost more, but may not be available in the specific neighbourhoods.” In disadvantaged American neighbourhoods, shopping is often restricted to convenience stores that sell high-calorie, processed food.

Food activists blame the US Farm Bill for this fat state of affairs and they’ve been pushing for reform as the new five-year Farm Bill is up for renewal in September. Hundreds of lobbyists (and even members of the Bush Administration) are fighting for more aid to fruit and vegetable growers and payment to protect the environment, but hundreds more have been fighting to retain the status quo, a system which provides a safety net for the largest farms and agri-businesses in the Midwest.

Adam Drewnowski has little hope much will change. “Agricultural policies have always been directed towards calories – the dairy industry, the beef industry, and the growing of some commodity crops – but never directed towards growing nutrient-dense foods, and by that I mean vegetables and fruit.”

In committee it seems political expediency has trumped: in mid-July House Speaker Nancy Pelosi agreed to a formula which will bring in a few reforms, but leave most of the big commodity programmes intact. She wants to make sure Democrat politicians from farm states do not fare too badly in the 2008 elections.



Jean Snedegar finds that in the US one in four supermarket food and drink products contains corn or corn derivatives. But are the cheap calories which corn provides fuelling the US obesity epidemic?

Edible landscapes on housing estates

Food growing provides a sense of place – quite literally putting down roots.

There is nothing more fundamental than claiming a patch of ground and planting a few vegetables. This is a pleasure denied to many people in the UK – think of the housing estates all over our towns and cities. Residents in estate blocks often live surrounded by disused, grassy areas, but at the same time might have no direct access or rights to land for growing fruit, veg and flowers. Waiting lists for allotments are at an all time high in many areas, and not everyone has the time or resources to take one on for themselves.

The Women's Environmental Network (WEN) has a long history of innovative growing projects in communities around the UK; the group has recently been working with housing associations, local councils and tenants to set up projects that match up those with a desire to grow food, with public institutions that actually control access to land around the places tenants live.

This does not mean the development of allotments on housing estates. Food growing gardens take the spirit of allotments and bring these into an estate setting. A well designed growing space could include food growing pockets e.g. raised beds or boxes, amongst the communal and play spaces. Each pocket can be allocated to one family, or three residents

could share a box. Edible tree planting or apple hedges as borders can create interesting and colourful features in communal areas.

According to Caroline Fernandez of WEN, "Housing associations are a good fit for projects such as this – they own hundreds of estates, with acres of open space, in cities all over the UK; a majority of tenants are likely to be living on lower incomes and associations are now not just supposed to house people, but to play a role in building healthy and sustainable communities. We have worked on a range of growing projects with tenants; some of which can be slow to get off the ground, but are worth the effort."

She continues, "One inspiring project is on the Limehouse Estate, East London, managed by Newlon Housing Trust. This group, The East London Family Project, has community planting days, they get together to share seeds and visit other growing sites and people have got to know their neighbours because they share common goals." As one resident says, "I love the joy of it. It's actually come up!"

WEN has also facilitated the start-up of gardening clubs on housing estates. These are spaces for people to come together and are often less formal than tenants associations. They have the advantage of focusing on food growing rather than other tenancy issues. They often involve a wider range of tenants who would not normally come to tenants meetings.

This 'social' aspect is important; housing associations are increasingly playing a role in managing anti-social behaviour (ASB) and some managers are concerned that ASB should be dealt with by innovative, community development solutions, rather than quickly resorting to legal or other punitive measures.

According to Tom Harding, Hexagon Housing Association's Housing Services Manager, "We work more and more on projects that are not just about repairs, or cleaning or abandoned cars on estates – what are seen as clearcut housing issues. Healthy eating and food growing are issues around which many residents are very keen that we do more and we do try. For example, we have a Time Bank whereby residents learn and exchange skills including gardening, cooking and food hygiene. It takes real effort on the part of staff and residents to get these community projects going, and there can be conflicts, but they are really worth it."



Runner bean growing at Shadwell Gardens. Photo by Caroline Fernandez copyright WEN. Reproduced with kind permission.

According to Caroline Fernandez, "The role of an outside facilitator can be to assess what exists, the interest and the opportunities. For example, could there be demonstration gardens at the community centre? Are there balconies or roof gardens that could be improved? Helping to achieve consensus on design and organisation can also be useful. For example, how to fit individual demands together with communal obligations? Can tools be shared? Should there be a committee, what are the rules?"

When it comes to food growing on housing estates every space is different, but experience is generating some basic guidelines. Caroline says, "Engaging with the tenants and assessing needs allows certain features to be built in to the design of the garden. For example, Wapping Women's Centre Garden project will have attractive structures in their gardens to allow the pumpkins to climb up – this was just what tenants wanted."

Creating connections also creates conflicts. Clare Joy at WEN often says, "Plants are easy; people can be tricky." For example, Shadwell Busy Lizzies had problems with people stealing their vegetables and problems with weeds and litter on the communal paths as the paths belong to nobody and everybody. One resident described the conflicts that can sometimes occur during harvesting as, "Wars." A community worker commented that, "There's a good side to the conflicts at least they are getting active and getting their adrenaline going!"

■ For further information contact Clare Joy food@wen.org.uk Tel 020 7481 9004. WEN is the only organisation in the UK working exclusively for women and the environment. www.wen.org.uk



Members of The East London Family Project planting a fruit tree on a housing estate with WEN. John Scurr Community Centre, Limehouse London. Photo by Caroline Fernandez copyright WEN. Reproduced with kind permission.

Pineapple bling

Courtney Van de Weyer reports on a business in Uganda linking land rights and food production.

In 1997, Sheffield-based Moses Kibuuka Muwanga inherited 492 acres of Bussi, a pristine island located in Lake Victoria off the banks of Uganda. A variety of food crops grow on the island, including pineapple, mango, coffee and lemongrass, all tended by communities of subsistence farmers.

Soon after he inherited the land, Muwanga discovered that most of the farmed land he now owned was already inhabited by a squatting community, with no legal right to the land. The squatters had built homesteads, but lacked health facilities, schools and clean water. Such a common situation decreases land value, so the usual result is eviction, leading to disbanded communities and individuals forced to find work elsewhere. The benefits are obvious – clear land can be turned into a luxurious resort or profitable plantation.

However, Muwanga opted to not evict the squatters but instead work with the community to

find a common solution. Legal tenancy of the land was granted, requiring a small rent, meaning more permanent dwellings could be built. The decision was not purely charitable. Muwanga saw value in what the farmers were producing and felt that better management could lead to a viable farming estate – particularly if the unspoilt land could be certified organic – the squatters had rarely, if ever, used pesticides – to meet the growing demand, and higher prices, for organic food.

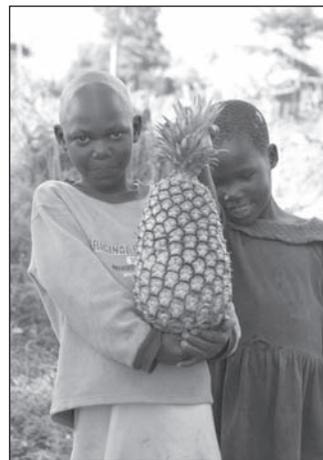
The result was the creation of the Jali Organic Association, to which forty-one farmers now belong, and the long road to organic certification by the Soil Association (SA). Partly because Uganda has no SA inspectors, the process took several years and a great deal of effort. As Muwanga recalls, “We first had the idea in 1997, but didn’t get certified until nearly 2004. It was a long process, with a rollercoaster of obstacles.”

Over that period, the community began to see improvements, including the installation of a large fresh water tank. These visible benefits have led to farmers from other parts of the island expressing interest in joining the Association. Muwanga remembers that, “When we first started, we were heckled at meetings by some people in the community. But now they’ve seen

some of the benefits, those same people want to join up. We’ve done more than any NGO has to help the community.”

Now, in order to further increase value, a small factory has been built on the island, to produce value-added products such as dried, organic pineapple. The products will be sold by a UK-based company Kibuuka, of which the farmers have shares, and will begin trading next spring.

Interestingly, Muwanga has not applied for Fairtrade status, viewing the proportion of the retail price returned to the producer as inadequate, with little contribution to environmental sustainability. Moreover, the hefty license fee can be unfeasible for such a small company. Muwanga explains, “The criteria are harsh, and everything we’ve already done might not even count as it was done before the application process. We just hope that we can communicate directly with the consumer, or that a larger company, that might use our produce in their products, stumps up for the label.”



Images show members of the Jali Organic Association in Uganda.

Quit drugs, start co

The Food Magazine visits a pioneering project working with recovering drug users in Brighton.

Changing an individual's eating habits is not easy, and this can be especially true for those who have much else on their plates. Substance misusers are a group that have failed to be included in most mainstream healthy eating projects, but a recent pilot project in Brighton aimed to address that failure. The project, 'Eating better, Thinking better' demonstrated the importance of teaching healthy eating as part of treatment for substance misuse and proved that there is genuine desire amongst individuals in treatment programmes for this type of advice.

Nutritionist Helen Sandwell joined Victoria Williams of Food Matters, a not-for-profit organisation, to develop the programme, which provided a six-week healthy eating course to two groups of individuals attending substance misuse treatment programmes. The aim was to give participants a greater understanding of the links between diet and mental and physical wellbeing, so that they might positively change their eating behaviour.

One of the groups comprised mainly men who had been required to attend a substance misuse treatment programme run by the Crime Reduction Initiative as part of their Drug

Rehabilitation Requirement (DRR) (a community based alternative to a prison sentence for drug related offences). A second course was run at Oasis, a project which provides substance misuse services specifically to women. The women participating on the course were either attending as part of their DRR or were part of the Parents of Children at Risk (POCAR) programme.

According to Helen Sandwell, "Most participants were in stage two of their treatment, having stabilised their drug use through replacement of illegal drugs with methadone or Subutex, although some were no longer dependent on any medication. We did not have full medical backgrounds on all individuals, but we know that some would have had drug-related health concerns such as hepatitis C. We also observed a high level of tooth decay and tooth loss amongst the groups; three of the participants had abscesses through the duration of the programme. Research shows that the more teeth a person has, the higher the quantity of fruit and vegetables they eat. Conversely, the fewer teeth they have the more sugary, fatty 'non-chewable' food they eat, which can lead to more tooth decay and further deterioration in diet."

Sandwell continues, "Emphasising the need for good oral health was an important part of the course. We also knew that individuals within the groups had mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, so we

emphasised the relationship between their diet and their mood and behaviour."

The project leaders were well aware that people's living circumstances could make changing their eating behaviour more challenging. "Many of the individuals were in temporary accommodation, such as in hostels, staying with relatives or sofa surfing," according to Victoria Williams. "All were on income support and so money was a major issue for them. Our challenge was to persuade these people that they could eat healthily, despite not having much money and for some, having little or no access to cooking facilities. Another major challenge was to motivate a group of people, most of whom had no choice but to attend our course as part of their DRR, to change their eating behaviour."

For a number of the women, the motivation came through the desire to provide healthy food for their children. "We initially found quite a low level of self-esteem with regard to healthy eating amongst the women," says Sandwell, "Again and again in the early sessions, the phrase 'It's not worth cooking for myself' came up. For some, providing healthy food for their children was more important than for themselves, so we could use this fact as an initial motivator, whilst working with the women until they recognised that it was actually worth preparing healthy food for themselves too."

Each session interspersed the provision of information, with practical exercises and food tasting. The course covered: general healthy eating; diet in relation to the specific health concerns of drugs users; mood and behaviour; eating on a limited budget; shopping; and planning a meal. The last session was a 'cook and eat' session, with participants helping to prepare healthy dishes that they might not normally eat.

"The final sessions were a great experience for everyone," says Williams, "People had grown more confident around preparing food and in eating food that was unfamiliar to them. Whereas at the beginning there were some point blank refusals to try unfamiliar foods, at our final sessions, everyone tried everything...and most of them liked all the food too!"

"There was one woman who was existing on Lucozade, sweets and crisps at the beginning of the course," Williams explains, "she told us she was always tired, which didn't make sense to her because she drank lots of energy drinks. She was quite resistant to change until one week we talked about high salt causing water

Helen and Victoria of the 'Eating better, Thinking better' project take a hands-on approach in demonstrating the importance of healthy eating as part of treatment for substance misuse.



oking

retention. She then wondered if that might have something to do with her being able to fasten her jeans in the morning but not by the evening. Whether or not that was so, it was the key to her starting to think about what she put into her body, and that it might have a knock on effect on her physical and mental wellbeing. By the end of the course, she was trying other healthier snacks and even planning to eat breakfast – a major step!”

An exercise in the final session was used to enable anonymous thoughts to be posted about things participants had loved, learned, would take with them and would throw away. Not everything was popular with everyone, for example, “Something I’ll throw away – soggy cooked spinach!” But, the exercise highlighted that participants had grasped healthy eating messages around fruit and veg, salt, healthier fats, slow release energy foods, reading labels and the relationship between food and mood.

“This course is highly significant in terms of drug treatment,” concludes Sandwell, “as far as we’re aware, there hasn’t been a healthy eating course of this length, anywhere in the substance misuse treatment field, which really gets to grips with all the physical and mental health aspects as well as the practicalities of life faced by individuals as they move from a life dominated by drugs to one which is drug-free. We hope that others working in the substance misuse field will follow this example.”



“Ronald just couldn’t stay away from the complementary snacks.”



The challenge was to persuade participants that they could eat healthily, despite not having much money and for some, having little or no access to cooking facilities

Badvert

God has a plan for your wallet

“Your healthy body is God’s plan,” according to the website of the US Faith Meds Institute.

“Choosing a biblical lifestyle that emphasizes God-made, natural fruits, vegetables and whole grains as well as healthy habits and exercise will help you feel better,” says FaithMeds but (and here’s the catch) “Sometimes, that is not enough.”

The answer, inevitably, is an expensive ‘optimal health’ course of pills, with such spiritual names as Diamaxol, Hyperexol, Cholestasys, Nutratose, Activive and Glycosure, offering you the chance to “let the miracle happen.”

As the founder of the Faith Meds Institute, Dr Don Verhulst says (with a gleaming smile), “I thank God for the

opportunity to share His good news and all His glorious blessings with you, no matter what your denomination or background may be.”

Presumably, Dr Don does not mind what denomination his customers pay in, either. One month’s supply of most of Faith Meds’ dietary supplements weigh in at a hefty \$67 (about £40).



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Child obesity and poverty

If you want to see the cumulative effects of historical trends in diet, look at older people. If you want to see the effects of modern diets, look at children.

In the UK, data collected for children show a clear difference in obesity levels between children in better off families and children at the bottom end of the income gradient. The message is clear – do not be poor if you want to stay thin. For girls, the risk of being obese is double if you live in a poor family compared with living in a wealthy one – see graph below.

The effect is not limited to the UK, of course. Similar figures to that shown in our graph can be shown for several other countries, although the number of surveys looking at child obesity

according to family income is surprisingly – perhaps shockingly – small.

An alternative perspective can be gained by looking at the proportion of the population in poverty and checking if this is linked to the levels of obesity among children. Data are available for more than a dozen European countries, and they show a strong association between inequality and obesity, among both children and adolescents.

It is clear that if you want to have a healthy child, make sure you are a wealthy family, or at least move to a country where poverty is relatively uncommon. Perhaps more realistically, if you want to combat obesity you need to tackle the economic causes.

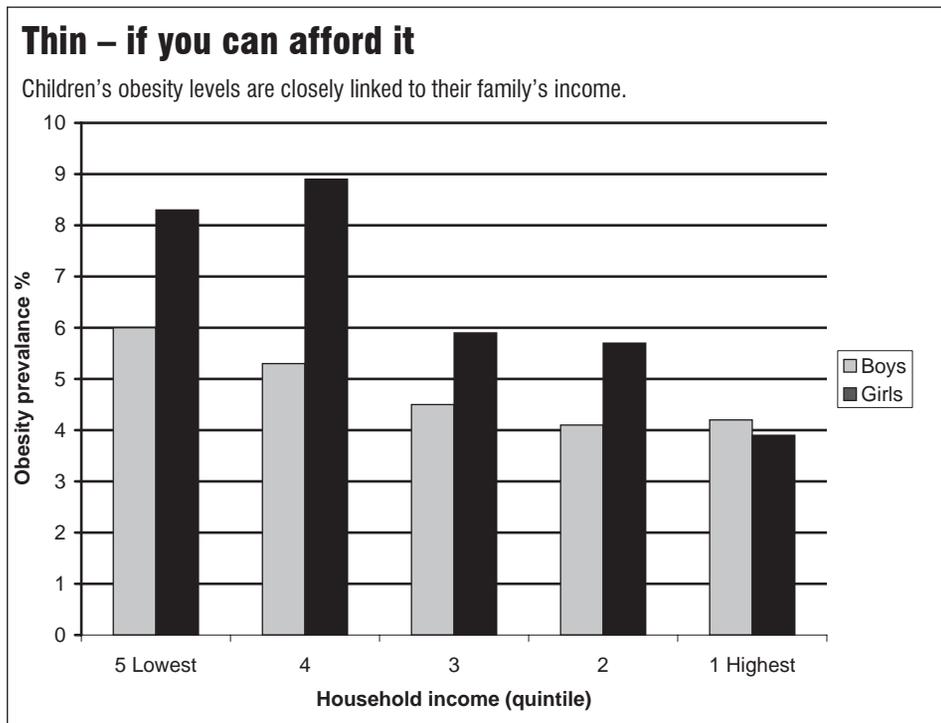
Health Ministers say 'control marketing to children'

The World Health Assembly, an annual meeting of Health Ministers at the World Health Organization's (WHO) Geneva headquarters, declared in May that an International Code of Marketing of Foods and Beverages to Children was needed, and instructed the WHO to develop detailed proposals.

The move took the WHO by surprise as a preparatory meeting in January had failed to take an opportunity to table the issue. But, persistence by the Norwegian government, and strong support by many smaller countries, especially in Africa, means the WHO is now committed to moving the Code development process forward. The move follows a similar declaration in support of tougher controls by European Health Ministers in Istanbul last November.

Consumer and health organisations have expressed their full support for a Code. A joint initiative by the umbrella organisation Consumers International with policy think-tank the International Obesity Taskforce (IOTF) has been established to make recommendations and to support a series of follow-up meetings hosted by the Norwegian government.

■ More details from Tim Lobstein at IOTF tlobstein@iofff.org



Chocolate biscuits against obesity

What sort of conference would have a programme featuring advertisements for chocolate biscuits, Nestlé Golden Grahams and McDonald's?

Why, a conference on childhood obesity, of course!

The meeting, organised by the European Childhood Obesity Group along with local organisers The Hellenic Medical Association for Obesity, met at the beginning of July, and promptly voted to accept the resignation of every member of the Executive Board.

The new Board has promised to revise the criteria for accepting industry support.



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Slow Food Nation

Why our Food should be Good, Clean, and Fair. Carlo Petrini, NY: Rizzoli, 2007 ISBN 0-8478-2945-6

When the news leaked out that McDonald's was about to violate Rome's Spanish Steps with its impious footprint, Italian food writer Carlo Petrini organized a demonstration in which bowls of pasta became threatening weapons of protest. Three years later, in 1989, he launched Slow Food, an organization which was to become highly visible in its support of the world's threatened indigenous cuisines. In less than two decades it has grown to 80,000 members in more than a hundred countries and has established a University of Gastronomic Science with campuses in Pollenzo and Colorno. The curriculum consists of a synthesis of scientific subjects, including agronomy, animal husbandry and food technology, together with academic subjects linked to food culture such as history and anthropology.

Petrini's second book, *Slow Food Nation: Why our Food should be Good, Clean and Fair*, is an attempt to set out the theoretical structure of this ambitious project and indeed of the entire Slow Food movement. Much of his text is devoted to establishing the 'New Gastronomy' on a, "solid scientific, historical and philosophical basis."

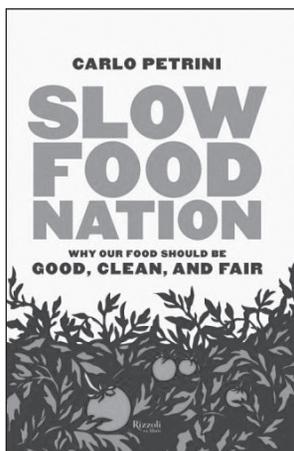
Interspersed with the pedagogy are journals from Petrini's extensive world travels to meet with the small-scale farmers and food producers that have come to shelter under the protective wings of Slow Food's regional Presidia. Everywhere that he visits, Petrini shows himself to be sensitive to what wine makers call terroir: the synergetic interaction of local geography, agriculture, technology and psychology. In Mexico he journeys to virtually inaccessible communities where the precious biodiversity of local maize is threatened by invasive industrial varieties.

At the prestigious Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market in San Francisco, he immediately grasps its ironic contradictions:

"The amiable ex-hippies and young dropouts-turned-farmers greeted their customers with a smile and offered generous samples of their [expensive] products to a clientele whose social status was pretty clear: either wealthy or very wealthy."

Petrini is not so naive as to be unaware that the same observation might be made of Slow Food's own membership. The University in Pollenzo has attached to it a comfortable hotel, a gourmet restaurant with a celebrity chef, and a Wine Bank consisting of thousands of rare vintages for consumption at appropriate prices. But if we wish to actually preserve the world's traditional cuisines rather than merely mourning their disappearance, then such accommodations are unavoidable.

Carlo Petrini's indispensable talent is his ability to inspire. At the first meeting in 2003 of the Commission on the Future of Food, set up by the Regional Council of Tuscany, he followed the dire



predictions of imminent catastrophe with a warm-hearted reminder that the purpose of food is not merely survival but also, even in the world's most

impoverished cultures, a profound pleasure. 'To reject pleasure in the belief that it only accompanies abundance is a serious strategic mistake,' he wisely observes. The great Indian scientist and campaigner Vandana Shiva then took up the theme and spoke of the importance of persuading small farmers to preserve or reintroduce native plants by teaching them how to cook them in ways that were delicious as well as nutritious.

I hope that Carlo Petrini will publish more of his humane, perceptive journals. Taste in food is notoriously disputatious: rather than attempting to establish a complex science of gastronomy on which few will agree, he should content himself with expanding Slow Food's admirable world-wide programme of identifying and supporting local foods whose ingredients and skills are in danger of disappearing.

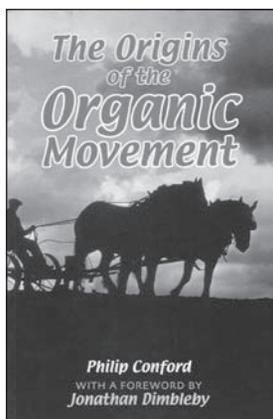
■ John Whiting, www.whitings-writings.com

The Origins of the Organic Movement

Philip Cornford, Floris Books, 2001, ISBN 0-86315-336-4. £20.00. www.florisbooks.co.uk
With a foreword by Jonathan Dimbleby.

We missed reviewing this book on the history of the organic movement when it was published in 2001, but it has come to our attention now because the author is currently working on its sequel.

And a good thing too, as this delightful volume contains a treasure trove of unusual information linked to inspired and determined people who saw not only the need for the promotion of health through optimal nutrition but also the need to go 'upstream' and look at the origins of good nutrition in the nature of agriculture. Above all, they saw the intimate symbiotic relationship between the soil in its rich biological diversity and the plants that grew from that soil.



If the soil can be kept healthy, the plants will grow well with a full range of beneficial nutrients, to be consumed in our daily diet for our own wellbeing.

Perhaps this all seems obvious and logical now, but a century ago it was not. There was, to be sure, an understanding of the need to provide plants with a flow of nutrients: in fact just such organic chemistry was the basis for Liebig's reputation in the 1840s and formed the backbone of the Rothamsted research institution in 1843, which to this day remains a strong supporter of chemical fertilisers. Equally, there was a vague understanding, expressed in the Rule of Return, that nutrients had to be put into the soil to achieve healthy plant growth. In fact, the Chinese had been putting organic waste – 'night soil' – onto agricultural land for many centuries. What was new was the connection made between micronutrients in human nutrition, the quality of the plants in the diet and the soil in which the plants grew.

The pioneers in this enterprise include Robert McCarrison, whose study of the Hunza people in India convinced him of the role played in determining human health by agricultural practices, notably the maintenance of soil humus enriched by the return of nutrients. The theme was echoed in the mid-1920s by Innes Pearce and Scott Williamson, the founders of the Pioneer Health Centre in Peckham – an attempt to promote healthy living through socially-provided facilities including healthy nutrition. And unexpected early supporters are noted, such as the poet TS Eliot, who as director of publishers Faber and Faber helped commission books on organic husbandry and contributed to the *New English Weekly* which was a prominent vehicle for ideas on healthy living.

And there were the more obscure spokesmen for organic farming, such as TH 'Sanderson' Wells, who wanted a, "return to the simple unaltered foods of Nature," linking this to, "Natural laws... for the elimination of the unfit, the foolish and the unthinking." In contrast, Edgar Saxon, who became a strong supporter of the forest preservation movement Men of the Trees, started out writing pieces on Food Reform and Nature Cure for a paper called the Christian Commonwealth, became a lifelong friend of the Tolstoyan anarchist and bookshop keeper Charles Daniel and took over Daniel's magazine *Health and Life*, a major influence on alternative health movements between the wars, while also establishing Vitamin Cafes, the first health food restaurants.

The author is currently working on a second volume, *From Margin to Mainstream*, which traces the subsequent development of the organic movement into the multi-million pound industry it is today, based on archival material and interviews with key personalities in the organic movement. If it is half as well-researched and well-written as this book it will be a delight to read.

■ Tim Lobstein

FSA confirms link between poverty and poor diet

On 11 July, to a select audience of 23 people, nine of them their own staff, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) unveiled the summary results of their £5m survey of what low-income people all over the UK are eating. The results of the *Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey* (LIDNS), released officially on July 15th, show that the 'lowest 15%' of the population in terms of household income and other deprivation measures, are eating around 2.5 portions of fruit and veg per day, compared with the national average of 2.8 portions, rather than the recommended five portions.

Consumption of oily fish in this sector of the population was around 34 grams per week for men and 48 grams per week for women, compared with the recommended minimum of 140 grams/week. A quarter of older adults were drinking soft drinks and eating crisps and savoury snacks every day, while for younger adults the figure was over 50%, and for children over 60% (soft drinks) and over 80% (snacks).

Despite high levels of overweight and obesity – with over 70% of all adults aged 50+ overweight or obese – there were also signs of poor nourishment. One in twenty younger women were severely underweight (below BMI 18.5) as were one in forty older men. Blood samples showed that one in seven younger women suffered anaemia. Iron intakes from dietary sources were very low for young women, with over half failing to obtain the bare minimum considered necessary to avoid chronic deficiency, and between a quarter and a third of young women were also failing to eat diets with enough magnesium and potassium.

The survey was somewhat flawed by the same problems that have beset previous surveys of this sort. The food intake figures are obtained from interviews asking people to recall what they have eaten on

previous days. Perhaps not surprisingly, some foods get forgotten – and these are most likely to be the poor-nutrient foods such as snacks, confectionery and soft drinks. As a result, the total intake recorded for adults provided some 83% of the amount of food energy estimated to be necessary to meet their needs – when compared with the obesity figures, this suggests severe under reporting of food energy intake, and/or chronic lack of any physical activity. The FSA acknowledged that a pilot examination of under reporting indicated that about 20% of foods had been forgotten. There were also wide variations in reports of consumption in the survey, making the average not always the most informative figure. For example, about 20% of men and women ate on average less than one portion of fruit and veg a day.

Although the survey found no evidence that location of shops or access to a car was linked to the poverty of the diet, it did note that 29% of households said they did not have access to enough food because of factors such as lack of money or other resources (e.g. storage, transport) at some time in the past year. A higher proportion, 36%, said they could not afford to eat balanced meals, with 22% saying they skipped meals and 5% saying they had not eaten for a whole day because of lack of money.

Differences between ethnic groups indicated that in general black and ethnic minorities in low income households managed to eat better diets than white Europeans. The survey also noted that there was little evidence of a north-south divide or other regional differences, indicating that a household's income level rather than its location was the important factor in determining dietary quality.

■ **Tim Lobstein**

■ Further details from FSA website www.food.gov.uk

The cost of calories

The Food Commission went out shopping in a low-income area in inner East London, to see how much food cost in terms of the calories you can buy for your pennies.

Typically, low income families spend about £22 per person per week on their food, including eating out. Assuming they need around 2,200 calories per day, this means they need to find foods that cost on average less than seven calories per penny.

This is what we found in the local Lidl supermarket, going for the best bargains available (July 12th 2007). Items less than around ten pence per 100 calories reflect good value food energy – but not a healthy diet!

	Cost of 100 calories in pence
Vegetable oil	0.7
Digestive biscuits	1.3
Custard cream biscuits	1.9
Sugar	2.0
Vanilla ice cream	2.1
Frozen sausages	4.3
Milk chocolate	4.7
Orange drink	5.1
Crisps (various)	5.5
Baked beans	5.9
Indian ready meals	6.5 – 8.2
Fruit sweets	6.9
Whole milk	7.5
Mild cheddar	8.2
Potatoes	8.4
Beefburgers	9.6
Frankfurters	9.6
Salami pizza	9.7
Sweet yogurt	10.1
Corned beef	10.4
Fish fingers	13.5
Skimmed milk	16.1
Battered haddock	16.5
Orange juice	16.9
Carrots	17.3
Fresh sausages	17.4
Back bacon	18.2
Onions	20.3
Fresh mince beef	21.0
Tinned tomatoes	22.1
Pears	29.8
Grapes	32.8
Green cabbage	36.0
Iceberg lettuce	45.7
Tuna steaks	46.1
Fresh beef steak	59.5
Fresh tomatoes	63.7
Prepared fruit salad	69.0
Cucumber	116.3

Keeping hunger pangs at bay without stretching your budget is simple if you like fatty, sugary food. By comparison, cabbages and carrots are a very poor bargain – you can spend a small fortune on salad and fruit and still feel hungry.

Poor diets will affect the next generation

The table shows the proportion of women of reproductive age in low income households, and the proportion of boys and girls aged 11-18 in low income households, who are failing to obtain the minimum levels of nutrient to prevent deficiency (below so-called Lower Reference Nutrient Intake (LRNI))

	Women aged 19-49	Girls aged 11-18	Boys aged 11-18
Vitamin A	13%	17%	12%
Riboflavin	19%	21%	15%
Folate	7%	5%	7%
Iron	50%	39%	14%
Calcium	13%	13%	10%
Magnesium	26%	46%	33%
Potassium	34%	23%	22%
Zinc	10%	18%	21%
Iodine	12%	13%	9%

Legal, decent, honest and true?

Misleading food and drink advertisements are supposed to be regulated by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). Here we report on recent adjudications.

X Garlic butter without garlic, or butter

The ASA failed to uphold a complaint against a Pizza Hut television ad which described the restaurant chain's Cheesy Bites pizza as being topped with garlic butter. The ad was challenged by a viewer who found that instead of garlic butter, the company used a 'garlic butter' spray made with rape seed oil, natural garlic flavouring, natural butter flavouring, beta-carotene and propane and/or butane propellant.

Whilst most of us would expect garlic butter to be made from butter and garlic rather than vegetable oil, flavourings, colouring and propellant gases, the ASA sided with Pizza Hut and commented that, "consumers would expect from the ad that the pizza had a topping that *tasted of garlic butter.*" [our italics]

Perhaps Pizza Hut can now drop the meat from its Meat Feast pizza, the seafood from its Seafood Fantastico pizza and the chicken from its Chicken Supreme pizza? After all, as long as the pizzas *taste* of meat, seafood or chicken, the ASA will support their right to advertise them as if they contain real ingredients.

X Sausages are 'hard work'

The ASA also gave their thumbs-up to a TV advert for Feasters microwave cheese-burgers. The ad showed a teenage boy searching through a fridge. He rejected sausages as, "hard work," a pepper as, "tricky," and fish as, "no idea," before he chose a microwave cheese-burger as, "perfect." The Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre (BACC) had already cleared the ad on the grounds that it, "only commented on the complexity of the preparation needed to eat those foods depicted and had not disparaged good dietary practice." The ASA supported their decision.

Do the decision-makers at the BACC and the ASA really believe that cooking sausages is, "hard work," and that preparing a pepper is "tricky?" Cooking is a basic life skill that should be encouraged, not undermined by adverts which create the notion that cooking is hard work and



Microwave cheeseburgers for people who find sausages too much 'hard work'.

that we are better off feeding our families with microwave burgers.

X 85% of women found it beneficial?

The advertising of dietary supplements is largely based on hype and the cherry-picking of nutritional research, so it is no surprise to find the occasional product falling foul of the ASA. In this case, Vitabiotics were trying to flog a vitamin supplement, Menopace, which they described as, "the only supplement just for the menopause that's endorsed by Bupa ... In tests 85% of women found it beneficial."

When the ASA requested more information about the 'tests' referred to in the advert they found that the studies were unpublished, uncontrolled, observational studies and not clinical trials. Vitabiotics entire evidence was based on a single review article, published in the *International Journal of Fertility*.

The ASA considered that the claim, "In tests 85% of women found it beneficial," implied that the tests were actual clinical trials and that Menopace could be used to treat the symptoms of the menopause. The ASA described the claim as misleading and found the advert in breach of CAP Code clauses 3.1 (Substantiation), 7.1 (Truthfulness) and 50.21 (Vitamins, minerals and other food supplements).

Several other supplements also advertise the fact they are endorsed by Bupa, including Jointace and Cardioace, both of which are also marketed by Vitabiotics. Bupa is of course a private health care company which will happily flog you breast enlargements, tummy tucks and face lifts along with health insurance. Getting its logo onto supplements aimed squarely at its target audiences cannot do the company any harm at all. According to Vitabiotics, Bupa only gave their endorsement after, "a review ... of research evidence to support the claims made for each of the products." Based on the ASA's decision, one has to wonder how robust Bupa's review was, and whether Bupa should be endorsing misleading claims such as, "In tests 85% of women found it beneficial"?



■ Ian Tokelove

Cadbury Schweppes accused of misleading 'all natural' claims.

Cadbury Schweppes could face paying out six years worth of refunds if a New Yorker succeeds with a court suit against the soft drink giant's labelling practices. Hemant Mehta has filed an action accusing Cadbury Schweppes of misleading customers with claims that certain products, including its Snapple juice and tea drinks, were "all natural" when they were not.

Mehta, who hopes the suit will become a class action complaint, alleged that the drinks contained high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and "other non-natural products," according to the suit filed at the Manhattan federal court in July. He is seeking to represent all people who bought certain Cadbury Schweppes and Snapple drinks over the last six years, and believes the company should pay damages of at least \$100 million (50 million pounds) on their behalf.

"HFCS does not exist in nature and is not 'minimally processed,'" the complaint said. "Describing HFCS as an 'all natural' ingredient is deceptive and unfair to consumers and competitors."

HFCS is produced by the intensive processing of corn starch (using enzymes) to yield a corn syrup consisting mainly of the sugar glucose. This syrup is in turn processed (using more enzymes) so that much of the glucose turns into fructose.

HFCS has become an increasingly popular sugar-substitute in the US. It is cheaper than sugar and, being liquid, it is easier to blend into foodstuffs, transport and store. In the UK it is also known as glucose fructose syrup and is used in products like breakfast cereals and juice drinks.

Super-size the sugar

If you saw the film *Supersize Me*, which revealed the effects of eating large amounts of junk food, you may remember the enormous serving sizes of sugary drinks, dwarfing even the largest of UK portions.

One of our friends recently visited family in the US and returned with this 'huMUGous', a special plastic mug with a straw for consuming your favourite soft drink. It holds a whopping three litres of drink.

Our friend reports that it is considered quite normal to fill such containers with sugary Coke or Dr Pepper, which we calculate could deliver over 60 teaspoons of sugar. The recommended daily maximum is around 12 teaspoons of sugar



– although US food manufacturers continue to hotly contest this limit.

■ Thanks to Courtney Van de Weyer for sharing her findings. And thanks to Joe Short for posing with the huMUGous.

Tinned fish decisions

Having read that tinned fish in brine is healthier than tinned fish in oil I would like to know if this also applies to people like myself who suffer from high cholesterol and monitored borderline blood pressure as I would have thought that brine would increase the level of sodium in the body. I would be grateful for some advice on this matter please.

K Toulson, by email

We thought this would be a relatively simple question to answer, until we started looking at the nutritional information given on cans of sardines, mackerel, salmon and pilchards. Some cans give nutritional information for drained weights, some for undrained weights and some appear to give inaccurate information, so this was not an easy job.

However, what we did notice straight away is that fish tinned in oil (such as sunflower or olive) also has salt added to it – so you can't skip the sodium by buying fish canned in oil. When we compared sodium levels for fish canned in brine, oil or tomato sauce there really was not much difference – with sodium levels only varying by about 0.1g gram per 100g.

Fish canned in oil will obviously provide more fat, even after the fat is drained off – but unless you are in the habit of also consuming the oil the difference between products is again small, being around 2-3g per serving (or half a teaspoon).

Make sure you read the labels on products, as a habit, and choose ones that fit your dietary requirements. As we are not in a position to offer specific, personal advice, we also suggest you contact your GP and ask to see the surgery dietician.

Incidentally, if you are eating fish for the natural omega-3 oils which it contains, steer clear of canned tuna because the canning process removes much of the omega-3 from the fish.

What does "high quality" mean?

Alongside readers' letters *The Food Magazine* also get lots of food company press releases, telling us all about their exciting new product ranges.

Such releases are often repeated word for word in newspapers and magazines by journalists who think it is acceptable to publish PR material instead of real news. Not only do the companies get free plugs for their products, but they can also avoid the meddlesome legislation which is supposed to ensure they only tell the truth when advertising their products.

The latest release to hit our desks comes courtesy of WeightWatchers who have apparently bought out a new range of delicious, guilt-free

desserts which they claim are, "made by using only the highest quality of ingredients, not to mention all the different great tasting flavours!"

The flavours certainly sound enticing and include such, "fruity delights," as 'Raspberry and Strawberry'; 'Strawberries and Cream' and 'Apple and Blackcurrant'. But, one look at the ingredients of these fake desserts and you get the feeling that WeightWatchers are rather exaggerating their claim of using only the, "highest quality," ingredients.

Whilst we are sure all of these processed ingredients and additives are of the, "highest quality," wouldn't it be nice to have seen just a little bit of real strawberry amongst them?



The Food Magazine is published by The Food Commission, an independent watchdog campaigning for healthier, safer food in the UK.

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 largely on our supporters, allowing us to be completely independent, taking no subsidy from the food industry or advertising. We aim to provide independently researched information on the food we eat to ensure good quality food for all.

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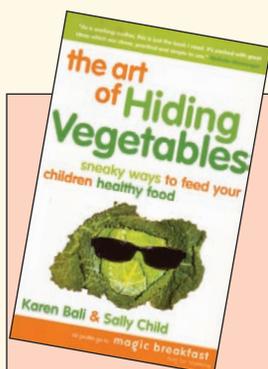


Just how expensive can we make fruit and veg?

Pomegranates sell for about 50p at my local greengrocer and they are pretty easy to open despite all of their sturdy, natural packaging. One of the delights of the world is surely the way you can endlessly discover little hidden pockets of juicy seeds just when you think there are none left.

Nonetheless, Sainsbury's has brought packaged pomegranate seeds to market – 120g worth of unappealing, damp pods all packaged in plastic with that small amount selling for more than twice the price of the fruit itself.

We also find regular promotions for daily juicing in lifestyle magazines. One recently hit our desks that suggests readers go out and pay £249 for an electronic juicer to, “increase your intake of energy-boosting nutrients.” An expensive way to do it – especially when the Food Standards Agency is keen to note that juice should only count towards one portion of your five a day.



Is it really such a good idea to take this sort of nutrition by stealth approach with kids? What exactly is the point of raising children who don't know they have been eating vegetables? Getting kids to eat what you'd like them to might be hard, but then so is getting them to go to school; or take baths; or not to deceive their parents. Parent veg-hiders look to yourselves.



Unnatural water

We spotted this bottle of so called Natural Water in a Lucozade vending machine at Clapham Leisure Centre. It is intriguing how selling works – people notice fizzy drinks are not so healthy, sales go down, so, companies turn to water. To boost their profits, they take that nice, healthy, cheap product, add sugar, sweeteners, flavourings, electrolytes and for a while manage to convince us that their version is actually nicer than just plain old water.

When that pitch gets a bit old, they can then start marketing Natural Water back to us at a premium – as plain old water again seems such a novel concept...None of which really explains why we purchasers fall for it over and over again.



Apples from around the world

The US does not have any shortage of apples – it produces 4.5m tons each year and has enough spare apples to export roughly 15% of the crop. So you would think the Tropicana company would have no problem getting hold of US apples for its 100% Apple Juice drink.

However, this simple juice drink is a dramatic demonstration of how once localised markets have been replaced by a truly global market. The small print tells us that the juice in this product has come from concentrates produced in: Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Argentina, Chile, Turkey, Brazil, China and the United States. That's some well travelled juice.

Interestingly, the juice also claims to be 100% Juice, which is a bit rich for a product which also contains added calcium hydroxide, malic acid, citric acid, flavours and ascorbic acid!

Pester power – no such thing

The food industry spends half of its time denying that it has undue influence on what children eat through its use of advertising, and the other half thinking up new ways to promote products. Many companies hate new Ofcom guidelines that limit TV advertising of high fat, salt and sugar products and claim that adverts make little difference to what kids want to eat. The trade press is regularly full of denials that pester power exists.

So, it was interesting to receive a brochure for a conference with the lead headline, “Utilise pester power and take advantage of changing media consumption patterns to create responsible campaigns that resonate with children and parents.”

A senior executive of McDonald's was down to give an “Ethical keynote Presentation,” which promised to offer advice about the Ofcom legislation to, “Ensure that you stay on the right side of lobbyists and the law.” The conference publicity noted that, “British children aged 7-11 are estimated to have a personal disposable income of around £2.7bn and that they, “Influence family purchases to the tune of £30bn in the UK.”