

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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Crunch time for UK apples

The UK loves its apples, but does it love UK apples?

The 2007 apple season is in full swing. A sunny Easter followed by a wet summer led to a bumper crop arriving a few weeks early. The apple's status as a symbol of traditional British food continues to flourish. Apple Day, initiated by the charity Common Ground in 1990, is celebrated on or around 21st October, and now includes hundreds of local events drawing

attention to more than two thousand varieties of British apple.

This cultural revival has not been lost on the supermarkets, where visitors encounter crates of UK apples swathed in Union Jack plastic wrapping and signs emphasising the 'Britishness' of their fruit. Tesco even boasts 'Heritage' apples, featuring a photograph of the manager of the National Fruit Collections at Brogdale in Kent. Tesco are the major sponsor of the Brogdale Horticultural Trust which manages the Collections.

So why is it then, that yet again, the supermarkets are full of apples from New Zealand, South Africa, USA, Germany, France and Holland? We still import three-quarters of the apples we eat. A snap survey of supermarkets in Manchester found only one third to a half of apples on offer were British. Our survey found no UK lines of Braeburn at all and only two UK lines of Gala. Of the few organic lines available, not one was from the UK, hailing instead, for the most part from New Zealand, and in one case, Italy.

Continued on page 4



A wasted windfall? Not any more. A project in Sheffield picks unwanted apples from trees in gardens and parks and distributes them for free. Photo from www.growsheffield.com

Action on additives

Recent research has proved that combinations of artificial food colourings and the preservative sodium benzoate can directly affect hyperactive behaviour in susceptible children. The additives have not been banned and remain in common use in children's foods, drinks and medicines.

The Food Commission has launched a campaign to highlight products which continue to use these suspect additives. A new website, www.actiononadditives.com lists the products, encourages parents to add new ones and to comment on those already listed.

Amongst the 300+ products already listed are Simpsons Freeze pops and Disney Tigger Gift Cakes.

■ See inside for more information.



Get the facts with The Food Magazine

Reasons to be cheerful

I have been thinking of Ian Dury and the Blockheads while putting together this edition of *The Food Magazine*. Listening to the 'Reasons to be Cheerful' compilation makes me laugh, especially the track, 'I want to be straight (Come out of the cold and do what I'm told and don't deviate)'. It reminds me of people who are full of life and questions – people who don't take accepted wisdoms, who laugh at themselves, who 'hoe their own rows' so to speak. What would we ever do without them?

Luckily, I do not often have to here at *The Food Magazine* and The Food Commission. It has been an incredibly interesting and challenging first year for me. Readers bombard us with questions that give us new research tasks – many letters never make it into the magazine, but they make it into the story ideas we commission and into the campaigns we pursue.

The barnstorming interest in additives shown by readers gave us fuel for success in getting funding for the Action on Additives website. A question from another reader about media coverage of obesity gave the beginning to an idea that led us to run a debate on the subject at the Sheffield International Festival of Documentary.

Subscriptions

The Food Magazine is the UK's leading independent watchdog on food issues. Take out a subscription and get a regular copy delivered straight to your door. The magazine is essential reading for anyone with a work-related or personal interest in food, nutrition and health. As a subscriber you don't just receive the magazine – you also provide invaluable support to The Food Commission's campaign for healthier, safer food.

You can subscribe online at www.foodcomm.org.uk or by calling 020 7837 2250 with credit/debit card details. We can invoice companies on receipt of an official order. Cheques should be made payable to The Food Commission and posted to The Food Commission, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

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Director/Editor: Jessica Mitchell

Office and Communications Manager: Ian Tokelove

Subscriptions Manager: Mel Nieuwenhuys

Additives Project Coordinator: Anna Glayzer

Cartoons: Ben Nash, Paul Lowe

Our conversations over this year with low waged workers and social housing residents have fuelled our certainty that we will pursue more work on food and low income.

One of the things this place isn't about much is money – which is a blessing and a curse. I love the fact that *The Food Magazine* takes no advertising of any kind and that The Food Commission offers so much for free. How many magazines do you get that do not try to get you to buy anything, not even anything 'good', nothing at all?

And yes that's a pitch. We rely on readers for more than their ideas – your subscription money is our only regular source of funding. And it is 'hoe your own row' money – no strings attached, available for campaigning and writing and everything that makes *The Food Magazine* and The Food Commission what they are.

If every one of you gave the magazine as a Christmas present, or asked a friend or colleague to subscribe, we would be able to do even more.

Reasons to be cheerful in the New Year – the continued success of *The Food Magazine* and The Food Commission. Have a good one.

Jessica Mitchell, Editor of *The Food Magazine*

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Contributors

Kath Dalmeny, Sheila Dillon, Anna Glayzer, Tim Marsh, Jessica Mitchell, Ben Nash, Brie O'Keefe, Fiona Laird, Tim Lobstein, Paul Lowe, Ian Tokelove, Paul Waddington, Lisa Wilson.

Food Commission websites

Food Commission: www.foodcomm.org.uk
Action on Additives: www.actiononadditives.com
Chew on this website: www.chewonthis.org.uk

Trustees and Advisors: Joanna Blythman, Dr Eric Brunner, Peta Cottee, Prof Michael Crawford, Tim Finney, Dr Mike Joffe, Robin Jenkins, Peter Koenig, Jane Landon, Prof Tim Lang, Dr Tim Lobstein, Dr Alan Long, Jeanette Longfield, Diane McCrae, Prof Erik Millstone, James Postgate, Dr Mike Rayner, Prof Aubrey Sheiham, Sue Todd, Hugh Warwick, Simon Wright.

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Parent power shines a spotlight on suspect food additives

Avoiding the food additives which can increase hyperactive behaviour in susceptible children just got easier, thanks to a new website set up by campaigners from The Food Commission.

The website, at www.actiononadditives.com, lists over 300 foods, drinks and medicines which contain the suspect food additives, and also gives the public the power to submit new products and comment on those already listed.

The website was set up following evidence published by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in September, which showed that cocktails of artificial colourings, mixed with the preservative sodium benzoate, can have a direct effect on some children's behaviour.

This research was undertaken because *The Food Magazine* had widely publicised the results of an earlier, 2002, study which was gathering dust in the FSA library. Whilst the first study had suggested a link, this second study has finally proved it.

However, the FSA, despite the evidence, has refused to ban the suspect additives. Instead, they have passed the buck to the European Food

Safety Authority (EFSA), which was already reviewing the safety of food colourings across Europe. It is hoped that EFSA will report back in January 2008, but even if they do initiate a ban, food companies will probably be given years in which to reformulate products.

In the meantime, the FSA, like the food industry, says that concerned parents can avoid the additives if they wish, as they are listed as ingredients on food packets. Of course, this only works if parents have the time to work their way through ingredients lists and are carrying a handy list of the additives to look out for. A magnifying glass may also be necessary, as ingredients can be printed in ridiculously small type sizes.

Meanwhile, children who buy sweets or snacks for themselves are unlikely to be checking for dodgy food colourings. Unpackaged food, such as loose sweets, take-away food and restaurant meals, do not list their ingredients, so it is practically impossible to know what additives have been used.

Some companies have been slowly cleaning up their acts, proudly declaring on packaging that their

The additives to look out for:

Tartrazine – E102
Quinoline yellow – E104
Sunset yellow – E110
Carmoisine – E122
Ponceau 4R – E124
Allura red – E129
Sodium benzoate – E211

Action on additives

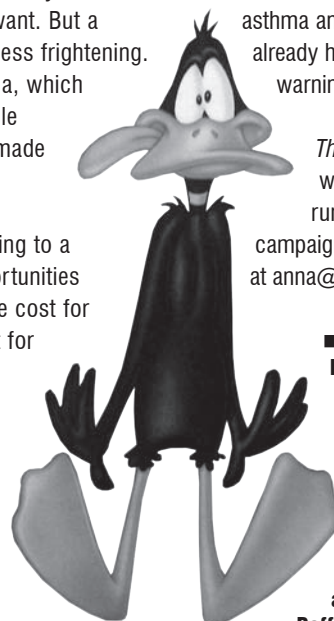
products are free of 'artificial colourings,' but it has taken years of hard campaigning to get the message across to them. *The Food Magazine* has always argued that consumers neither need nor want their food to be coloured using synthetic agents.

It is worth noting that, under EC guidelines, the suspect artificial colourings should be accompanied by a health warning when used in medicines, stating that they, "may cause allergic reactions." The same guidelines say that the preservative sodium benzoate should carry a warning that it can be, "mildly irritant to the skin, eyes and mucous membranes." No such warning appears on food labels. The FSA warns that sodium benzoate can make the symptoms of asthma and eczema worse in children who already have these conditions, but again, no warning appears on food labels.

The Food Magazine would like to welcome Anna Glayzer, who is running the Action on Additives campaign. Anna can be contacted directly at anna@actiononadditives.com

■ www.actiononadditives.com. If you know of products containing any of the suspect additives, please let us know by using the simple online form or by writing to Action on Additives, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF.

Lurid artificial colourings make products attractive to children, as do cartoon characters like Daffy Duck, who appears on sweets containing E104 and E129.



Let's make VAT a tax on junk

The idea has been rumbling around for several years, but whenever someone says, "shouldn't the government tax sugary, fatty food like they tax cigarettes?" the quick response comes that the public just would not wear it.

"No-one wants their food basket to be taxed, and anyway, you can't define good and bad foods," comes the stock reply.

But, both these criticisms of a junk food tax could be proved wrong. For a start, we are already paying tax on food. Not all food, but 'luxury items' including restaurant and café meals, fruit juice, peanuts, cakes, ice cream, confectionery, soft drinks and savoury snacks.

Which brings us to the second issue: how do we define good and bad foods? What should get a junk tax – and what might even get a subsidy?

The answer could lie in the same formulation used to calculate what foods are banned from being advertised during children's TV. The procedure is called nutrient profiling and the Food Standards Agency has spent several years coming up with a surprisingly straightforward method for making a decision, based largely on the nutrition declarations that can be found on most food labels. Nutrient

profiling can be used to define two categories (good versus bad, or taxed versus untaxed) or even a range of categories (taxed heavily, taxed lightly, untaxed, etc).

And would it be popular? That all depends how it is described. A tax on food would have the tabloids fuming about the nanny state and our right to eat what we want. But a redistribution of VAT is much less frightening. And a 'revenue neutral' formula, which means some things go up while others come down, could be made attractive.

This is just what has been proposed in Denmark. According to a fascinating report on the opportunities for adjusting VAT to reduce the cost for healthier foods and increase it for unhealthy foods, the scheme could be easy to administer, and attract popular support.

One consumer survey showed that three quarters of shoppers were in favour, while only 21% were unhappy with the idea.

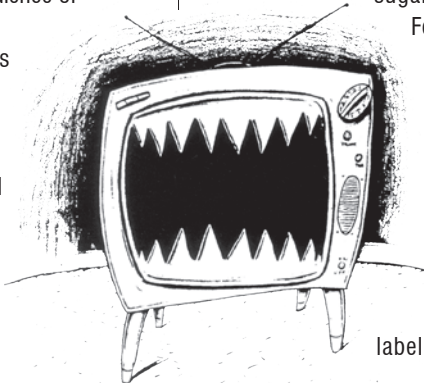
So why are we waiting?

TV ads still promoting junk foods to children

Research from the consumers' organisation, Which?, shows that 12 out of the 20 TV programmes most watched by children under ten are not covered by current guidelines on junk food advertising.

Advertising restrictions are in place for programmes where a high enough proportion of a programme's audience is made up of children. This means that a programme such as *The X Factor*, which has a child audience of almost 450,000, does not have advertising restrictions, as this is not a high enough proportion of the overall audience for the show. But, high fat, sugar and salt foods cannot be advertised during *The Simpsons* which has a child audience of around 160,000.

Which? is now renewing calls for a 9pm watershed ban – with no adverts for unhealthy foods shown on any programme broadcast before then. The Food Commission supports the 9pm watershed and hopes that recent rumours that Gordon Brown may be planning such a move prove to be true.



Calories still not on the menu

Which has more fat – a Chicken Caesar Salad or a Traditional Lasagna? If you guessed the lasagna, you are wrong, but you are in good company. In a poll of more than 500 Californians, 68% were unable to answer even a single question correctly when asked about the nutritional content of restaurant meals.

The Food Magazine reported in our last edition about the difficulty of choosing healthier options in restaurants when so little information is available to customers. Here in the UK, there are various voluntary schemes in place to highlight dishes lower in fat, salt, sugar and calories, but the

Food Standards Agency currently has no plans to actively pursue compulsory labelling for restaurant meals.

Over in the USA, some legislators and public health officials are pursuing mandatory labelling with mixed

success. In California, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has just vetoed a bill that would have required restaurant chains with at least 14 locations to conspicuously post nutrition information on menus and menu boards. In doing so, the Governor noted that he believed it was unfair to penalise certain types of restaurant and that the point of sale information was unnecessary as, "more and more companies are making detailed information available online." For those who eat out with their laptops this could be useful.

In New York City (NYC), the situation seems more hopeful. Plans to roll out compulsory labelling were knocked back earlier this autumn but the NYC Department of Health is redrafting its proposal after being advised by legal officials that the failure was due to a technicality. It now hopes to have a scheme in place by March 2008 that would require all restaurant chains with more than 15 outlets nationally to post calorie information on menus and menu boards. This would cover around 2,400 restaurants in NYC, 10% of all food service establishments.

Food festivals in the dock

Britain is a hotspot for food festivals these days. In part, these are about celebration – a sense of hurrah about having British products to shout loudly about and to relish. But, that is not all they are – a food festival can contribute to the regeneration of local economies and communities.

Or so we hear – but just how much do they contribute to local people and businesses? Are they mostly about wealthy foodies getting a chance to sink their teeth into more posh nosh? Just whose food culture are they revitalising anyway?

Those are some of the questions Jessica Mitchell, Editor of *The Food Magazine*, was invited to debate at the Abergavenny Food Festival's first ever conference 'Food Festivals: Improving British Food Culture or Extravaganzas for Affluent Foodies?' The discussion, with panellists Dr Martin Caraher – Centre for Food Policy, City University; Tony Griffiths – head of Food and Marketing Development, Welsh Assembly Government and festival director, Martin Orbach, was broadcast by BBC Radio 4's *The Food Programme* with presenter Sheila Dillon as chairperson.

The Abergavenny Festival is one of Britain's most successful and has been going for nine years. For a few days a year, the place is like an alternate universe in which food is top dog – food to eat of all types is everywhere, celebrity chefs wander the streets in droves, you can go to lectures about things such as fruit ripening or foraging.

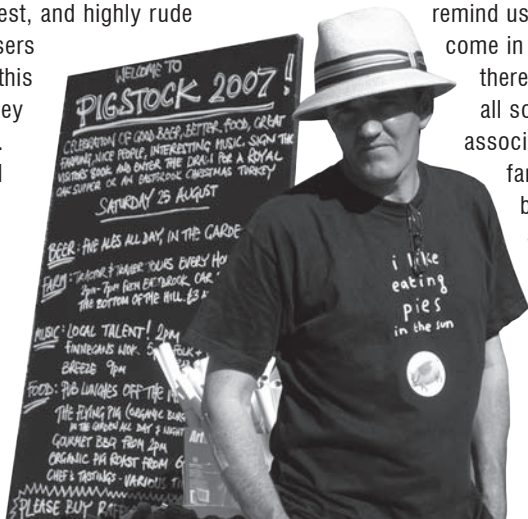
But, the organisers are keen not just to rest on their laurels – it was their idea to host the debate and to invite *The Food Magazine* to criticise the event. Although, attending an event only to say it is ****, seems hypocritical at best, and highly rude at worst, organisers assured us that this was just what they wanted us to do.

It was a good spirited debate, with some convinced that the festival was fantastic news for Abergavenny – with, for example, local

food producers finding new customers, and with great tourism knock-ons throughout the year when people come back to stay because they so loved the area and its foodstuffs. Others, including Martin Caraher and Jessica Mitchell, raised questions about the cost of tickets for the festival, a preponderance of cooking demonstrations, food stalls and light-hearted events over issue based or community activities and a tendency to invite high profile chefs, who are already over-exposed.

In the end, it was left to the many interesting people in the audience to remind us all that food festivals come in many types – and that there is probably scope for all sorts. Schools, housing associations, allotments and farmers' markets have all been getting in on the act – so choose the one for you.

Pigstock 2007 – a celebration of organic pig farming at East Brook Farm near Swindon. One of many food festivals now held around the UK.



The decline of the fresh British spud

Until recently, the crisp company Walkers was using adverts to tell us how 'healthy' their crisps were. However, their latest £7.5 million advertising campaign has leant heavily on the idea of buying British. Walkers, they proudly explain, uses only British spuds when making their crisps. Frozen chip manufacturer McCains has taken the same approach, emphasising that it only buys from British farmers.

Meanwhile, if you go looking for fresh potatoes (you know, the sort you cook yourself) you may find it hard to find a British spud. They are there, but you might find that many of the tatties in your local supermarket come from far flung locations such as Egypt and Israel, rather than the muddy fields of East Anglia or Lincolnshire.

The reason for this is that food processing now consumes over half of our domestically grown potato crop. For the last few years the British public has actually been eating, on average, more processed spuds than fresh ones – preferring crisps, frozen chips and ready-to-eat 'mash' over the freshly cooked potato.



This shift in consumption patterns stems in part from our increasing preference for ready-to-eat or easy-to-cook foods. The downside is that processed spuds cost us more, and often come with added fat and salt which makes them less healthy for us.

There is also a strong economic factor at play here. Processing a food can reduce nutritional quality, but it adds financial value. For example, a kilo of spuds, fresh from the field, has a retail value of about 46p. That same kilo, turned into frozen chips, is worth 99p. A kilo of 'ready to eat' mash is worth just over £2.00 and, if transformed into crisps, a kilo is worth over £5.00. And money makes money – having increased the value of potato by roughly 1,100%, the crisp manufacturers reap huge profits, which they can plough back into advertising campaigns to encourage us to eat more crisps.

As more and more of our home crop has been swallowed up by the food processing industry, and as supermarkets have come to dominate the grocery sector, the farming sector has also seen huge changes. As recently as 1970, there were 43,346 registered farmers growing potatoes in the UK. By last year that number had dwindled to 2,920 – just 7% of the 1970 total. Today's farms are much larger, typically planting 41 hectares (ha) with potatoes, versus 5.5ha in 1970. The farms are also more efficient, producing 45 tons/ha, compared to 30 tons/ha in 1970.

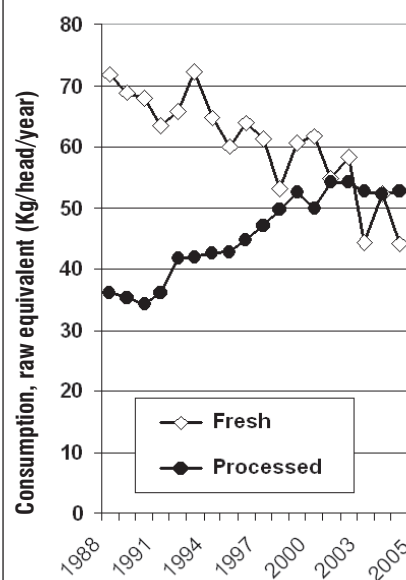
The huge drop in the number of farms reflects market forces – the processing firms and supermarkets prefer to deal with farmers who can supply large quantities of potatoes – not the small scale farmers with perhaps half

a dozen hectares to their name. Almost three quarters of all the fresh potatoes sold in the UK are now sold through just four supermarket outlets, led by Tesco, with a 30% stake in the market.

■ Visit www.britishpotatoes.co.uk for recipes and info on British spuds.

Processed spuds have overtaken fresh potatoes

Per capita consumption of potatoes in GB 1988-2005



Consumption of fresh potatoes (top line) has dropped while consumption of processed potatoes has risen.

■ Source: Yearbook of Potato Statistics.

Cracking the egg code

A one-man campaign to force the Department for Environment, Food And Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to give consumers the right to know where eggs are produced has met with success. Roy Benford's rather epic struggle started more than two and a half years ago when he asked DEFRA to provide

him with an explanation of the Farm ID printed on eggs. Specifically, Benford knew that part of the lettered and numbered ID code printed on all eggs refers to specific producers, he wanted to know how he could find out who those producers were and where they were located.

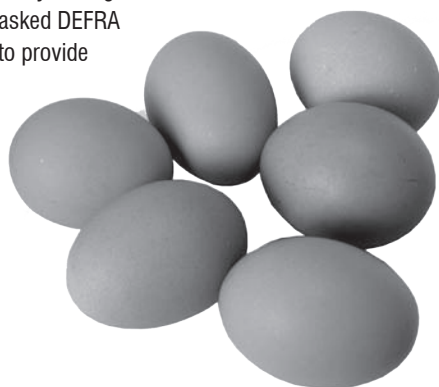
DEFRA refused, claiming that disclosing such information was a breach of personal confidentiality for the producers and that such information could be used by animal rights extremists to target premises. Benford took his case to the Government's Information Tribunal, which has largely dismissed DEFRA's objections, and now information must be made available from the codes including: the place name (unless it is a town with fewer than 10,000 people); the

county and the outbound postcode (the first part of the code that gives information relating to the main sorting office in the region).

Benford is very pleased with the decision, noting, "I always wanted the information so I could find out more about local producers. I think businesses that produce food for public consumption should not be able to hide behind codes that mean nothing to the public."

Benford is now considering pursuing similar claims around ID codes found on meat products.

■ Roy Benford is looking for volunteers to assist him and can be contacted at roy@benford.demon.co.uk



Crunch time for UK

Continued from front cover

Whilst the abundance of this year's apple harvest has been widely reported as good news for the UK apple industry, even a bumper crop has been unable to meet consumer demand. It is important to remember the role that the supermarkets have had in producing a situation where the commercial production of apples in the UK is such a difficult business.

David Deme, owner and manager of Chegworth Valley Farm in Kent, found that selling to supermarkets was simply not financially viable. Besides the fact that returns were barely enough to cover costs, Deme found the frequent visits from pack house inspectors hard to swallow.

In order to produce the uniform 'perfect' size, shape and colour apples required by the supermarkets, he was required to spray the crop, "above and beyond," what he felt was an acceptable level.

Then, in 1997, a bad frost gave the farm no choice but to diversify. They started producing juice as well as fruit and selling through farmers markets and to independent businesses. The success of this venture meant that they were able to stop selling to the supermarkets altogether a couple of years later.

Another organic apple grower, Neil Johnstone, one of the owners of Windmill Orchards in Oxfordshire, found the supermarkets unreceptive to discussions when he started growing ten years ago.

"They are not geared up to work with local businesses. They operate a national supply chain based on price," he said. The promotion of local economies underpins the Windmill Orchards business model, with much of their produce being sold through a cooperative village shop.

Is variety a priority?

The growth of the organic market in recent years seems to preclude the argument that consumer demand for the perfectly boring apple, in preference to more russety, odd shaped fruit, has been the main driving force behind the supermarkets' pursuit of the plain varieties. There is certainly a demand for more interesting and unusual varieties.

At Chegworth Valley, now fully organic, Deme realised the need to dramatically expand his range from just cox apples and conference pears, after talking directly to customers at farmers markets. He now grows over 40 varieties.



Photo by Ida Fabrizio

Unicorn Grocery in Chorlton, south Manchester has been selling knobbly looking organic apples for eleven years including more unusual varieties like Falstaff and Laxton's Fortune. Fruit buyer, Rob Alderson, says that, "Customers here are generally happy with the odd blemish, but it is sometimes hard to shift the worst looking fruit."

That the consumer's appetite for imperfection remains rather lukewarm is illustrated by Waitrose's announcement last summer that it would sell, "ugly fruit," alongside more manicured produce, but at a discounted rate. Whilst Unicorn Grocery sells local produce wherever possible, there is still pressure to stock certain 'staples' year round, which means importing.

Alderson says, "Customers do value local production over cosmetic appearance but people's knowledge of what is seasonally possible it still at odds with what is happening in the fields. Retailers need to take responsibility for closing this gap."

As this year's round of Apple Day events gets underway, the apple's status as a cultural icon seems likely to enjoy a continued growth. Whether this will translate into more UK apples being grown and sold, however, remains open to question. Government support for apple growers and fruit research is minimal to say the

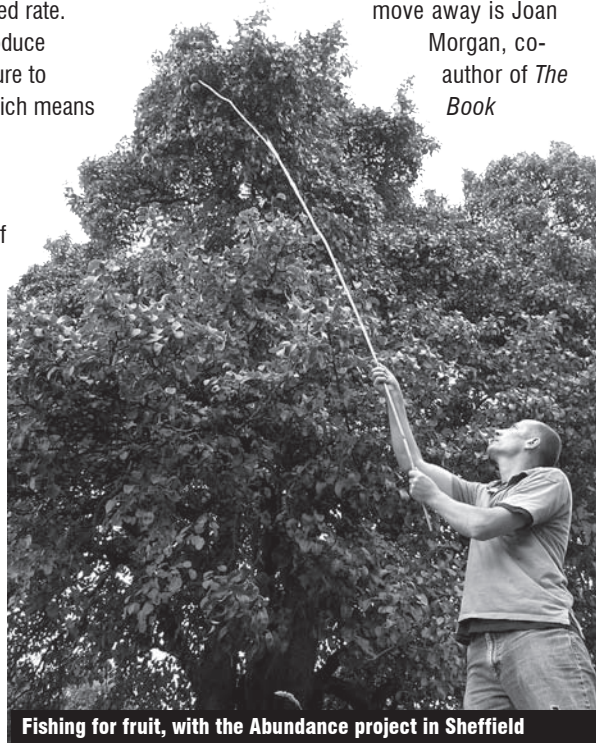
least. Traditional orchards have crept up the biodiversity agenda over recent years, but primarily as habitats. As the experience of Deme and Johnstone shows, a good deal of resourcefulness and willingness to diversify is required to survive as a commercial apple grower in the UK.

National Fruit Collections under threat

The future of The National Fruit Collections at Brogdale, in Kent, which include over 2,000 varieties of apple, is under threat. DEFRA, who own the trees, but not the land on which they grow, have put the contract to manage the Collections out to tender with a decision likely to be made before Christmas. Depending on who wins the tender, the Collections could be moved to another site, despite the landowner of the current site's stated willingness to extend the lease to 2050.

Campaigners, including a number of fruit experts and enthusiasts, fear the collections could be damaged and some varieties even lost if a move goes ahead. Amongst those bidding for the contract are the current managers, the Brogdale Horticultural Trust (BHT), who feature on Tesco's 'Heritage' apples. They are in favour of moving the collections.

Amongst those who feel betrayed by the decision of the BHT to back a move away is Joan Morgan, co-author of *The Book*



Fishing for fruit, with the Abundance project in Sheffield

apples

of Apples, whose connections to Brogdale go right back to the founding of the BHT. She and others from a group called the Friends of the National Fruit Collections, say the Collection must stay. "This is the greatest collection of temperate fruit trees in the world. We have fifty years of data collection with trees in the same place, with records about growth and climate. The current landlord wants us to stay,

and is also spending money to improve access to the site for the public. A move could be a real tragedy, and it would be such a pointless exercise."

Thus, Brogdale, much like the British apple, finds itself in a perilous position. Despite an increasingly clamorous fan club, they remain in need of clear and convincing support from the Government, from industry, and from the public,

in order to guarantee their deserved position as national treasures.

■ Anna Glayzer

■ See www.fruitforum.net for information about the campaign to keep the National Fruit Collections at Brogdale.



Foraging for fruit in Sheffield

Ever wander the streets near your home and feel sad about how the fruit from so many trees in gardens, parks or road sides just falls to the ground and rots? One project, Abundance (part of Grow Sheffield), did something about that. Volunteers harvest fruit from trees and redistribute it for free to community cafes, Surestart projects, from stalls and to schools. Local residents are encouraged to call in if they know of a tree that needs harvesting. According to Anne-Marie Culhane of Grow Sheffield, response has been great, and the whole project has been, "a very positive and exciting adventure." Local people get healthy fruit, grown locally – good for them and the environment.

At one of the Surestart projects young children helped to make stewed apples, took apples home and one day used the fruit as part of a healthy lunches session with parents. According to project workers the children loved it, and asked questions such as, "Apples grow on trees don't they? Do pears grow on trees like apples do?"

It is hoped that the Abundance project will get the funding to run every year.

■ www.growsheffield.com



Free fruit on the streets of Sheffield, courtesy of the Abundance project

Tackling obesity a priority

How many big, fat reports will it take to make a trimmer Britain? Sadly, no answers to that one yet.

But, *Tackling Obesity: Future Choices*, might just cause a bit of indigestion in certain quarters. The new report, Government backed, and put together by experts from around the UK, is probably the most comprehensive attempt to not just scientifically understand the many determinants of obesity, but also to predict the consequences of both Government and individual lethargy over the next 40 years.

The consequences of inaction, according to modelling conducted by the National Heart Forum, will be disastrous for individuals and also for our economy. If we think we live in a society now where overweight has become the norm, then we need to prepare ourselves for one where 60% of adult men, 50% of adult women and about 25% of all children under 16 could be obese.

In 2002, those who were overweight or obese cost the UK nearly £7 billion (bn) in health treatment, state benefits and indirect costs such as loss of earnings and reduced productivity. In 40 years' time, at today's prices, that figure could reach nearly £46bn a year as levels of obesity reach unprecedented highs.

The reports reminds us of what many readers of *The Food Magazine* will already know, or at least suspect, that the causes of obesity are extremely complex, encompassing biology and behaviour, but set within a cultural, environmental and social framework.

What may be most unpalatable to the food industry is that there is compelling evidence that humans are predisposed to put on weight by their biology. This has previously been concealed in all but a few, but exposure to modern lifestyles has revealed it in the majority. So, although personal responsibility does play a crucial part in weight gain, what is more significant is the way in which

human biology is being overwhelmed by the effects of today's 'obesogenic' environment, with its abundance of energy dense food, motorised transport and sedentary lifestyles. As a result, the people of the UK are inexorably becoming heavier simply by living in the Britain of today.

The authors argue that tackling obesity has striking similarities with tackling climate change. Both need whole societal change with cross governmental action and long term commitment. Many climate change goals would also help prevent obesity, such as measures to reduce traffic congestion, increase cycling or design sustainable communities.

■ The full report can be ordered or downloaded from the Foresight website www.foresight.gov.uk

■ Tim Marsh, Associate Director of the National Heart Forum and co-author of *Tackling Obesity: Future Choices – Modelling Future Trends in Obesity and Their Impact on Health*.

On the joys of

Jessica Mitchell meets small shopkeepers unhappy with the might of the big supermarkets.

Jane Isfort and Sally Butcher don't know each other, but they have a few things in common – they run neighbourhood shops in south London, in neighbourhoods they live in and love and both can tell you about a lot more than the price of onions. And, in different ways, they are both passionate advocates of small shopkeeping.

Isfort runs the Aroma Organic shop, just off the busy main road running through Streatham. Tables are full of leaflets for community events and shelves are full of nuts, fruit, flours, pottery – all with no price labels. “The local supermarkets send in spies to see what I am selling and for how much. It sounds unbelievable, but it's true,” says Jane.

When I visit, she is stirring up action against a new Tesco due to open down the road. As she pulls me to the window, she says, “Look at those signs out there, the big, bright yellow and black police ones, you can't miss them – when they put up the signs about the Tesco, they were on bits of faded paper, down so low on a fence

you'd have to be three years old to see them. That's not right.”

Sally Butcher owns a shop called Persepolis with her husband Jamshid. It is a wild emporium, in bright yellow, on the main road running through Peckham. Iranian melons, pomegranates, herbal waters, seeds, spice mixtures, breads and pastries jostle for space with Iranian drums, glassware and humourously threatening signs, such as – ‘Thieves will be Impaled.’

Butcher's new, and first, book is a beauty called *Persia in Peckham*. Full not just of delicious recipes – lentil rice with date fudge, citrus-infused vegetable hotpot, plum hotpot with chicken – it is a story about family, about the history of Iran, about the mix of people that makes Peckham and about how a small shop can knit all that together.

“Small shopkeepers... get to know their customers, and exist in symbiosis with their neighbourhood. Thus if something goes wrong... if Mrs. Smith varies her routine or Mr. Brown doesn't turn up one day... the shopkeeper is often the first to know. In a successful neighbourhood, this imbalance leads to appropriate remedial action. This does not and cannot happen with supermarkets,” she writes.

Isfort agrees, “My shop is rife with customer input, my husband sometimes reminds me that I



Jane Isfort in her Aroma Organic shop points to where the new Tesco Extra will be opening in Streatham, south London. She already has to contend with a Sainsbury's Local just down the road and a Somerfield store opposite to her own.

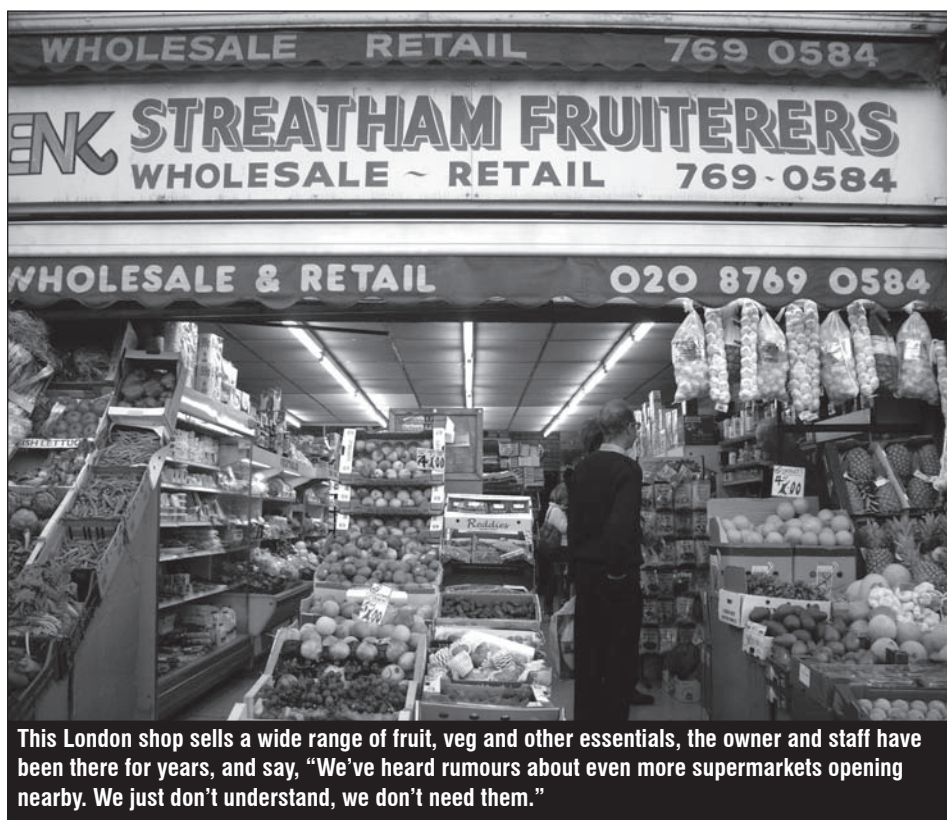
need to sell things, not just chat to all the people who come in about what is happening in the neighbourhood.”

When I met Butcher she was in celebratory mode, her book just published and surrounded by family and friendly customers. Her book is full of humour, about living with her in-laws, about the, shall we say, lively Peckham customers, about the difficulties of importing foods from what customs officials regard as the ‘Axis of Evil’. Husband Jamshid told me they welcome discussion with customers, but that he sometimes has to tell the most argumentative ones to, “come back and spank us after ten when we close.” Now, that's an offer you don't get very often from Tesco.

But, the family humour, and Sally's own poetic and fanciful notions, “what is a shop other than a whole catalogue of stray thoughts and fancies fugitive?” are somehow sharply political reminders of what we have to lose when corner shops fold their shutters. And, we need these reminders. I know poetry is rarely on my mind during a visit to Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda and the like.

Competition and small shops

The Competition Commission recently announced provisional findings of its investigation into the groceries market in the UK. Judith Whateley of the campaign group Tescopoly notes that, “The recommendations in the recent report from the Competition Commission to free up the planning system to make it easier for big supermarkets to build new out-of-town stores will have a devastating impact on independent shops based in town centres. We need stronger planning policies to ensure consumers have a wide range



This London shop sells a wide range of fruit, veg and other essentials, the owner and staff have been there for years, and say, “We've heard rumours about even more supermarkets opening nearby. We just don't understand, we don't need them.”

shopkeeping

of shops to choose from and to curb the growth of the big four supermarkets."

The report also drew the fury of the Federation of Small Businesses, "Small independent retailers are closing at a rate of 2,000 per year and you've only got to walk down your local high street to see the evidence of this...The specialist retailers and independent stores that offer consumers real alternatives are suffering from the anti-competitive practices of the supermarkets. The Competition Commission's latest report does nothing to address this."

In her book, Sally writes, "This is not a tirade about supermarkets: their price-fixing, the spies they send out into nearby small shops, the often miserable and unhelpful staff and the general absence of anything remotely philanthropic in their mission statements. We won't mention any of these. This is, rather, a paean to all things small and corner-shaped."

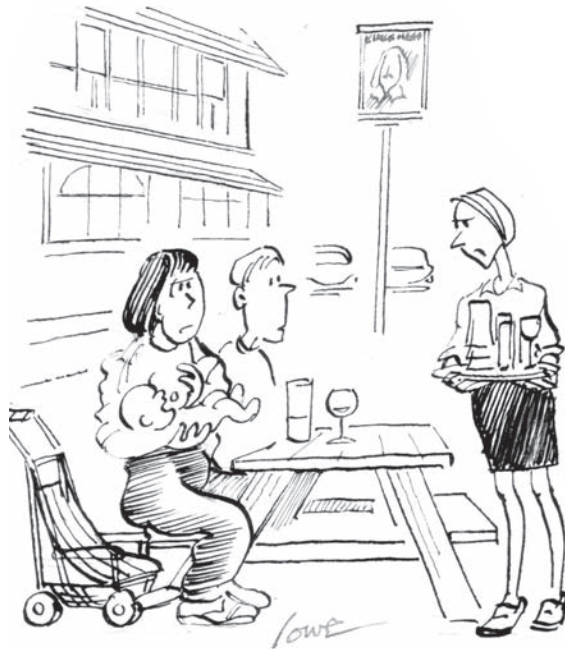
Back in Streatham, there is further worrying news on the horizon, where rumours have reached Isfort about plans for another supermarket development on the site of a former Megabowl. Lambeth Council's magazine gives support to those worries, "we want to see more good quality retail development taking place, while keeping the balance between independent businesses and larger ones. The Megabowl is one site where there is an opportunity to create

retail space of the size major retailers require... local businesses and local residents' views on this issue are always welcome."

In an area that seems increasingly hemmed in by these chain stores, Isfort notes sadly, "Many local shops have gone since last Christmas. Recently, a local baker has shut up shop, the new Sainsbury's

finished him off. Every time a new space opens up, or planning permission comes up now people just chew their nails in worry. It is hard to find the time to fight it all."

■ For information and support about how to oppose new supermarket developments, visit the Tescopoly website at www.tescopoly.org.



"Our customers are only supposed to consume food prepared on the premises"

Sally Butcher
in her shop
Persepolis, in
Peckham, south
London. The
new book *Persia*
in Peckham is
published by
Prospect Books,
ISBN 978-
1903018514
and is available
from all good
bookshops.



Brits grow bananas

Sainsbury's must have sources of British fruit as yet unimagined by the rest of us, as recently they seemed to be claiming to sell British oranges and bananas. We are not sure which county is enjoying the sort of weather required to manage that – write and tell us if you know so we can move there.

The shelves under the British bananas sign had melons under it actually – also not grown in the UK. In fact, most of the things under the British food signs in the supermarkets we visited were not from Britain. Some came from as far away as the Dominican Republic and South Africa.

We thought British Food Fortnight was an opportunity to highlight the wonderful range of produce grown in the UK by our dedicated farmers. We know supermarkets are failing UK farmers, so it is an especial cheek to



hang the signs, and the Union Jacks – only to appropriate the rest of the world's fruit and veg as our own.

Hull ends free school

When the Labour controlled Hull City Council decided to offer free school meals to all children in 2004 the move was so radical that they needed to obtain 'Powers to Innovate' from the Department for education and skills (DfES) to implement it.

At the end of the three-year pilot programme, children themselves were saying that they were more ready to learn and teachers said that the children were less hungry. However, the new Liberal Democrat-controlled administration chose not to continue the project when they took power earlier this year, in spite of the promising initial evaluation. This September saw the reintroduction of charging.

Eat well, do well

Councillor Mary Glew held the education portfolio at the time the free meals programme started in 2004. She explained that providing universal free school meals aimed to improve health, education, social and behavioural attitudes. She also pointed out that the universal element, "removes the stigma of free meals." At that time, only half

of the children eligible for free meals were claiming them.

Hull has a high level of deprivation causing problems in both health and education. Adults have very high rates of cancer, heart disease and stroke, and some children are malnourished. When it comes to education, primary schools fare quite well in the league tables, but secondary schools are almost at the bottom nationally.

The three-year pilot free meals scheme, called 'Eat well, do well' (EWDW) provided:

- breakfast in the schools that had a breakfast club (about 85% of schools)
- free school lunches for all children
- a piece of fruit for all children in primary and special schools
- a drink in the after-school clubs

Even before Jamie Oliver hit our screens, it was decided that the turkey twizzlers had to go: a healthy menu was introduced two months before the free meals scheme started. Unsurprisingly,

when these were first introduced, there was an initial drop in uptake. However, when the meals became free two months later, the situation reversed, with an average of 64% of pupils eating the dinners last year.

Contrast this with the rest of the country – national school dinner uptake has declined since the introduction of healthy school meals. A recent Ofsted report said: "Inspectors found that reasons for the decline were complex, but included a lack of consultation with parents and pupils about the new arrangements for healthy school meals, poor marketing of new menus and a lack of choice in what was offered."

In Hull, however, the enormous effort made by so many different

people working on EWDW to address these issues seems to be one of the reasons why more children ate the healthier food.

Healthy eating co-coordinator Sue Rae said, "Many of these children have never had a bit of broccoli and never seen a member of their family eat a bit of broccoli." It therefore took a great deal of encouragement by dinner ladies, careful planning of menus, and work with parents and children to introduce healthy food to the menus. Even some head teachers were against the project initially, but many changed their opinion when they saw how it worked.

Headmaster RN Petch of Paisley Primary School worked on the advisory committee with the caterers. He says that before EWDW, any form of potato that wasn't chips was, "a bit of a mystery to the children." The children were obliged to try the vegetables, and whilst there was still more waste than he would like, it felt that they, "were winning." The school is still hanging onto improvements introduced by EWDW despite the end of the scheme. For example, old favourites like sausages are still the most popular choice, but the quality of the sausages is now better. In his school they also have a 'healthy snack award' for those bringing packed lunches and after-school cookery clubs.

The social aspects of eating were also addressed by EWDW. Some schools had a 'buddy system', with the older children watching out for the younger ones in the dining room, which can seem an unfriendly place. Children were shown how to hold their cutlery properly as some of them were starting school not knowing how to hold a knife and fork.

Cooks in the school kitchens reported being pleased to be cooking again, as they had been deskilled serving ready meals, but some serving staff needed encouragement and training. A pilot scheme to train lunchtime supervision staff in behaviour management, helping them to talk and listen to children and to try to improve the lunchtime experience is still ongoing.

Results

The Eat well, do well scheme was evaluated in great detail by Professor Derek Colquhoun at the University of Hull. The evaluations showed some striking results. Children reported themselves to be more alert, and those eating the school lunches did better in tests after lunch than those having packed lunches. The teachers found the classrooms to be calmer, creating a better environment for learning.

The nutritional content of the school dinners improved during the programme so children



A healthy free school meal at Adelaide Primary School in Hull during the 'Eat well, do well' programme. Photo from Hull City Council.

meals experiment

were eating less fat and salt and getting more vitamins. More teachers also started to eat the lunches themselves, which suggested the food was more appealing. An analysis of the packed lunches showed that the children were eating too much saturated fat, sugar and salt and overall calories, but still lacking in micronutrients.

It is impossible to attribute improvements in educational performance solely to diet and there have been other support projects in the schools, but it is worth noting that the recent Key Stage 2 results in primary schools are the best they have ever been.

Colquhoun also notes that the 64% take-up in Hull was about the best even free school meals can expect because some children just do not like them and some parents prefer packed lunches.

The end of free school meals: the Lib Dem policy

Earlier this year, the Liberal Democrat-controlled council decided to stop the universal free school lunch scheme. Since then, the average uptake of school meals has dropped from 64% to around 40%. This is in spite of a marketing campaign over the summer encouraging parents who are eligible for the free meals to register again: it is thought that as many as 1,500 have failed to do so.

One of the other problems is that many people in Hull are on low incomes, but still earn enough to lose their eligibility for free school meals. For many families, £1.10 per day for each child in primary school is not easy to find. Councillor Glew mentioned that she recently saw a child with last night's cold fish and chips in their packed lunch.

When Councillor Mike Ross (who holds the life-long learning portfolio) was asked how they would spend the £1 million that would be saved by scrapping the scheme, he said some of it would go on improvements to the school meals service.

He mentioned, "working with children and parents to bring forward a menu that is healthy but acceptable... and to help engage the children with something that they wanted to eat." Rather like the EWDW programme – although he wasn't able to give any examples of projects. He also mentioned that they are intending to spend over 70p on the ingredients for school meals. Current spending is about 67p. Initial reports suggest in fact that the administrative cost of putting charging back in place will be around £1 million a year.

Glew says that she is devastated. "The research is clear, if children are hungry, they can't perform. If they are eating well, their health will improve." For some children, the loss of the free meals may mean, "a loss of life chance and an education."

Professor Colquhoun is now looking at the impact of withdrawing the free lunches. He says that, "children are still telling us that they are hungry..." One head teacher described the dining room now as chaotic and messy and another head says that behaviour is worse." Colquhoun explained that hunger remains an important problem nationally. He said, "we were so obsessed with obesity, we have taken our eye off the hunger problem." It is hard not to be moved by this.

■ Fiona Laird, MSc Health Promotion



Ironically, members of the Lib Dem controlled council in Liverpool have visited Hull with a view to providing universal free school meals.

So, these children involved in healthy eating workshops at a school in Rainford, Liverpool may be benefitting from the sort of scheme that the Hull Lib Dems have scrapped.

Cutting the salt

The Food Commission has been working for the past several months with residents of Hexagon Housing Association in south east London on the 'Eat less salt' project. Funded by the Food Standards Agency, the project involves Hexagon staff and residents in free workshops to learn more about how to read labels in order to choose lower salt options and how to cook foods without added salt.

Workshops include special sessions with teens living in temporary accommodation, including teenage mums. The Food Commission has also done sessions with people in care homes who have long-term mental illness.

While the Hexagon community has made a commitment to doing its best to reduce salt consumption, there are serious questions about how well business is doing to help the consumer.

A recent survey of fast food restaurants by the campaigning group, Consensus Action on Salt Health, found shockingly high levels of salt in meal options – including one Pizza Hut meal that contained more than a child's recommended daily salt limit.

After a survey of food products this summer, the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) said that industry could be doing better to meet Government targets for salt reduction in processed products, and also noted that industry may be deliberately confusing consumers with salt labelling information. For example, packets of chicken nuggets were found which described 15g – or one sole nugget – as a serving and gave nutritional details accordingly.



Reading labels can be a tricky business, but 'Eat less salt' workshops give housing association residents helpful tips.

"It would make it much easier for the consumer to make informed choices if the information was presented in a meaningful way," said Geoffrey Theobald, chairman of LACORS.

"The 'salt per serving' unit should be a realistic quantity and not one that provides a false sense of security to people buying the product."



Fitness n ver vending n

Have a swim or a good game of squash – then have a Kit Kat, or a Mars Bar or a bag of crisps or a Coke or... any one of dozens of high fat, salt and sugar foods almost undoubtedly on sale right there in your sports centre lobby. If you are thirsty you can help yourself to a fizzy drink.

Junk for sale

The Food Magazine did a survey of vending machines in 12 sports and recreation centres, in seven London Boroughs and Brighton. The centres were all local authority ones, but usually managed by private companies. We found:

- Vending machines selling junk food in every centre we visited
- No fresh fruit or veg on sale in any vending machine
- Children's play equipment located right next to vending machines
- Coke or Pepsi on sale in all but two centres and Lucozade in all but one
- An average five vending machines in each centre, with as many as eight in one lobby

- Leaflets promoting healthy eating and activity courses for young people available alongside junk food vending machines
- Additives and preservatives in products commonly available in centres including Oasis juice drinks, Lucozade Energy, Love Hearts candy, Fanta, Starburst candy
- High sugar products masquerading as nutritious, for example, Kellogg's Nutri-Grain apple soft bake bar with calcium 37 grams (g) has 12g of sugar and the FairTrade cranberry&raisin Geo Bar (35g) has 17.6g of sugar, more than half the bar
- High salt bagged snacks such as Wotsits on sale in every centre
- If you consumed some of the products, for example, a Mars Bar or a Lucozade Energy drink, half an hour of moderately performed exercise including swimming, aerobics and football would not be enough to burn off the kilocalories (Kcal).

Promotion to children

The centres we visited were full of children – a perfect chance for the companies making these products to promote them to young people.

Many of the products we viewed are the type of junk foods banned from advertisements during children's TV programmes. The vast majority of the products would also be banned for sale at schools under new healthy eating guidelines. Many contain the additives about which there are now particular worries (visit www.actiononadditives for more information).

Understanding what is in products

It is difficult to figure out what is in these products.

- You cannot see the nutritional information through the machine before you buy
- Some sugary products such as Mars Bars or Kits Kats are not even required to tell you how much sugar is in them
- Some products have fewer Kcals but are then full of artificial sweeteners
- Some product lines offer versions of products that confuse with the way information is provided. Let us consider the Go Ahead! range. The products appear to be healthier from their labelling, and in one sports centre were on the healthier shelf but they do their best to confuse us with varying portion sizes and nutritional claims.

The Go Ahead! apple&sultana cereal bar weighs 30g and the Go Ahead! apple crispy slices 43g. The cereal bar makes no front of pack claim, but notes 2.3g of fat per whole bar. The crispy slices make a Lower Fat front of pack claim but that information is based on slices, not the whole bar. If you ate all three slices (and you would I assure you, it is not a big bar) you would get 3.6g of fat. The crispy slices are also higher in sugar (17.7g per pack, more than 3½ tsps) than the cereal bar with 11.2g. If you were to give them a colour using the FSA traffic light system, they would be red for high in sugar.



After a workout comes reward. But be warned: some of the snacks on offer will pile on more calories than you have burned off.

nachines us nachines



Calories and exercise

It is difficult to judge just how many calories are burned off by exercise. This varies by gender, age, weight and even then measurement is not an exact science. People also generally overestimate how much they have exerted themselves – thinking that moderate exercise is vigorous for example.

There are websites which claim to help people figure this out – you put in your details, type of exercise, time you did it for and how vigorously, and out comes the kilocalories you will burn off.

Some sample estimated daily Kcal requirements:

Male 11-14 years:	2,220
Female 11-14 years:	1,845
Adult female:	1,940
Adult male:	2,550

Anything to be cheerful about?

We did find a few good things: two centres in the London Borough of Lambeth had machines with healthy shelves with some dried fruit, nuts and seeds available; one centre had carrot crisps (73 Kcal, low in salt and saturated fat); fresh juice was available for sale in all but one of the centres.

Water was always on sale, but fountains were very rarely to be found in the lobby near the vending machines. A major problem with the healthy foods is that they were swamped by the junk choices – including junk choices masquerading as healthy options.

Why are these machines in sports centres?

There is a lot of money to be made out of having these machines on site. According to the Soil Association's recent report into

hospital and sports centre vending, *Not what the doctor ordered*, the busiest leisure centre in Mansfield town makes £50,000 a year from its eight machines. The report also noted that healthier vending machines were placed in some centres, but that sales from these cannot yet match those from branded products.

We want some changes

Public authority sports centres should be required to have healthy eating policies. The Government should develop best practice guidelines and promote these. The guidelines should at least specify a range of healthier options (including fresh fruit, pure juice, nuts and seeds); ensure these make up the majority of products on offer; and ban products high in salt, saturated fat or sugar.

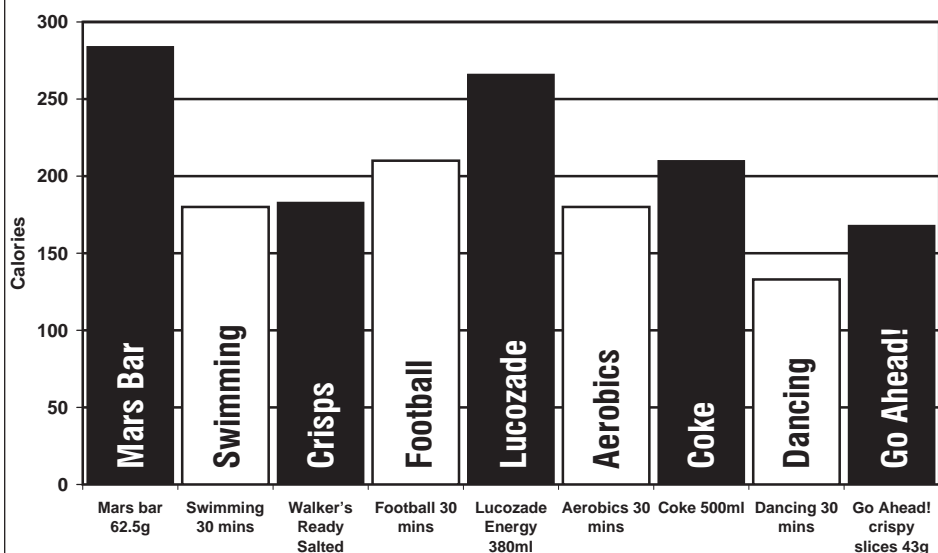
Policies should also be developed to minimise availability of products with artificial sweeteners, and the additives outlined at www.actiononadditives.com.

■ Jessica Mitchell

Junk food snacks and exercise

This bar chart compares the number of calories used by a 60kg teenager undertaking various moderate exercises for half an hour, with the number of calories in the types of snacks and drinks found in vending machines in sports

centres. Sports centres can be a great place to burn off excess calories, but as the bar chart makes clear, you had better watch out for the highly calorific snacks.



Catch them young. A Pepsi drinks machine stands next to a sports centre children's play area.

Invasion of the zombie seeds

The UN estimates that 1.4 billion farmers in the world are seedsavers – they practise the age-old tradition of saving seeds and re-using them for future crops. This practice has allowed farmers to develop diverse local seed varieties suited to their regional climate for over 12,000 years. But all this could end, thanks to Terminator technology.

Terminator technology, which is subject to a temporary UN ban, and the more recent 'Zombie seeds' are a form of genetic modification being developed by biotechnology companies to create plants that produce sterile seeds. There is no point in farmers saving these seeds as they will not grow.

Terminator technology has been developed because, historically, seed companies have had difficulty in enforcing their intellectual property rights over crop varieties. It is expensive and difficult to sue farmers for the use of a company's seed varieties. Terminator is a perfect self-enforcing biological mechanism to protect property rights: it ensures that seeds are single-use only.

But, while Terminator technology would boost seed company profits, it could impoverish the poorest farmers because they would increasingly be forced to buy new seeds from seed companies. Small-scale farmers would become dependent on seed companies rather than being able to farm sustainably and be self-sufficient.

Fernando Ruiz is a development worker with the NGO, Progressio, in Quito, Ecuador. He said, "Indigenous peasant farming families depend on what they grow. If they can conserve their seeds, it means they have independence and the ability to produce their own food. When they start to buy their seeds from agricultural shops they lose agrobiodiversity and independence."

Terminator technology is bad news for agricultural biodiversity. If contamination with other crops takes place, the Terminator gene could irreversibly alter the wild varieties on which indigenous people have traditionally depended for food and medicines. The practice of selecting, saving, sharing and replanting seeds has been fundamental to the development of agriculture. It is responsible for the existence of thousands of plant



varieties adapted to local soils and climates and resistant to local pests.

In acknowledgement of the potential risks that Terminator technology poses, in 2000, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) imposed a world-wide ban on its field testing and commercialisation until socio-economic and scientific tests have shown the technology to be harmless to people and the environment.

Pro-GM countries including Canada, Australia and New Zealand, together with biotechnology companies, have lobbied to lift this ban. At a CBD meeting in 2005, the Canadian government tried to block consensus on motions against Terminator technology and to argue for its legal commercial use. Progressio was part of a global campaign of environmental, farming and development organisations that campaigned for the ban to remain. Thanks to the strong support of the British people, over 250 MPs from all parties signed an early day motion asking the UK government to support the ban on Terminator Technology, and the ban was upheld in 2006.

The threat of Terminator technology has not disappeared, as biotechnology companies are developing new variations of the technology to get round the ban. For example, the EU-funded 'Transcontainer' research project is developing the so-called 'Zombie seeds': a variation on Terminator in which farmers must buy chemicals to bring their sterile seeds back to life.

In May 2008, the CBD will meet again. Environmental, farming and development campaigners expect the pro-GM lobby to try again to lift the ban. Progressio needs your support to ensure that this does not happen. We are inviting you to alert your local MP to the dangers of Terminator being commercialised.

You can do this using the 'Harvest' seed packet in this issue of *The Food Magazine*. Rather than recycle it, please sign and send us the postcard. It asks your local MP to urge the British government to do everything in its power to uphold the ban at CBD negotiations. For more seed packets and information on the seedsaver campaign go to www.seedsaver.org.uk or call 020 7354 0883.

■ Brie O'Keefe, Progressio's environment campaigns officer, www.ciiir.org

Saving seeds

Nelson Ramon Mamallacta Alvarado, 42, his wife, daughter and extended family live just outside a small indigenous Kichwa community of about 100 people called Lushian Mariposa, near Archidona in the Ecuadorian Amazon jungle.

"The community is trying to save its ancient knowledge. I'd like to try to get it to be taught in schools because the children in the school here in Archidona now don't learn anything about plants. If you stopped a child here and asked him what a plant was he would say 'I don't know – my dad knows ask him' and the truth is that the father might or might not know.

We, my family and my community, are protecting our food security and saving our seeds but others are losing it entirely and have become dependent on buying food and buying seeds. I would say the majority do not now save seeds. People are becoming more urbanised.

People here do not understand what GM seeds are. There is almost no awareness at all of the threat. They are going to come and they are going to keep trying to bring genetically modified seeds to our country. We need to work together to prevent them from coming to Latin America.

It is another incursion into our lands and our lives, like the petrol and government projects. It is all about big companies trying to make money, not about improving the quality of our lives."



Nelson grinding leaves to make natural insect repellent. Photo: Michelle Lowe/Progressio

Climate chaos threatens food supply

Sheila Dillon, presenter of Radio 4's *The Food Programme* reports on the double whammy of population growth and climate change.

On July 28th, Ian Tollhurst returned from a conference debating the big issues in organic food production to find a great swathe of his 20 acre veg and fruit farm near Reading deep under water. When I visited in mid-August I saw yellow straggly courgette plants making a brave attempt to live again and Tollhurst and his small team frantically potting up seedlings to compensate for some of the lost crops. He estimated he'd lost about 40%.

Tollhurst is one of the most experienced organic horticulturists in the UK but that is irrelevant when the waters rise. Because he has a close relationship with his 400+ weekly veg-box customers, Tollhurst was able to explain in his newsletter what had happened, what was missing in the box and why there were substitutes for all the crops that had drowned. That practical education, plus recipes for every unfamiliar fruit or veg, has kept his customers on side, so he's able to carry on. If there are more floods next year, he says, the business is finished.

In the meantime, he is working at putting what he calls more 'resilience' into the business – by planting varieties that will thrive even with

low light levels, because for most growers in the UK, it was not just the water that caused problems last summer, it was months of almost no sunshine. As I left the farm, Tollhurst told me there was an upside to all the misery: "I think the silver lining is that people are beginning to understand that food comes from a real place as a result of a lot of hard work and doesn't just appear ready wrapped on Tesco's shelves by magic."

He might be right. The magical thinking created by the globalisation of our food supply and the phenomenal amounts of imagination, money, thought and cheap oil put into the supermarket supply chain in the UK has had a lot of us in its grip. But, there was evidence after the floods that it was not just the Tollhursts of Britain who were educating their customers.

The damage to crops was so widespread – in the flooded areas 40% losses were the average – that the supermarkets got into the game. All the big players lowered their cosmetic standards for produce in short supply (Duh!, as Bart Simpson might say) and most put up in-store notices explaining why, as Sainsbury's told us on *The Food Programme*, "produce specifications have been relaxed to allow farmers to sell produce that wouldn't ordinarily be accepted."

Waitrose and Sainsbury's both said they were paying more for crops worst affected by the rains including apples, soft fruits, leeks, potatoes, carrots, all the squashes, and sprouts – which seems economically par for the course. But crops going into the supermarket chains aren't being



Floods in the UK have been wreaking havoc with food production.

sold in a free market – as William Chase, potato farmer and founder of Tyrell's crisps said earlier this year, "there is no free market any more."

UK supermarkets buy around 90% of their fresh produce on forward contracts. Most of Britain's pea farmers, for example, have not benefitted in any way from their crop being in very short supply – they had already sold it at prices agreed in 2006. With about 70% of the UK's pea harvest destroyed, that means they have not begun to cover their costs. How they will pay to plant next year's crop is not clear.

Potato farmers are not much better off – in early October the farming press were recording 100% losses in previously saturated fields in Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, Cheshire and other parts of the Midlands. In fields that had not been flooded, losses were running between 5 and 50%. Whether forward contracts, centralised distribution and the rest of the supermarkets' formerly highly economically efficient systems can survive and prosper in these conditions is open to question. Grain farmers also suffered from the floods, but they are not tied into the supermarkets and are benefitting from high global prices (on top of their EU subsidies) as a result of world wide shortages.

The floods in the UK were not an isolated occurrence. Had they been, the effect on our food supply would be limited, but unusual climatic conditions were the norm this year. Drought in Australia (the 6th year), another year of drought in California and many of the grain growing areas of the American midwest, floods in northern Europe, dramatic heatwaves and forest fires in southern Europe, severe droughts and floods in different parts of Africa. All happening as the demand for biofuels intensifies, and China and India move toward a Western diet with all that



Simple fish farming technology promoted by the NGO Practical Action in Bangladesh. The fish are kept in closed cages so that when the frequent floods come the fish are not washed away.

Continued overpage

means in terms of protein production – more and more grain needed to feed the animals in the factory units being built there by the vertically integrated global agribusinesses already making a fortune trading and processing grain.

In late October, the UN Environmental Programme issued its fourth *Global Environmental Outlook* report: the global back story. In the last 20 years, the population up 34%: from 5 billion to 6.7 billion and still rising fast. Financial wealth up by a third in the same period. Annual emissions of CO₂ up by a third since 1987. The land available to each person on earth shrunk to less than 2.02 hectares while the demands being made on the earth for resources needs about 22 hectares per person. Overfishing on a huge scale. Increasing numbers of dead zones where no fish live. It is a long frightening list and it can seem abstract and unreal in Britain in spite of the floods. A lot of that increase in global financial wealth keeps us well insulated. Other countries are not so fortunate.

A visit to Bangladesh

In September, I was in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, for a few days. Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries on the planet – around two and half times the UK population crams into a land mass 100,000 km² smaller than ours. It is hard there not to think you are watching the canary in the coal mine, struggling for its breath, warning us that time is running out.

Dhaka has been a chaotic, desperately overcrowded place for a long time, but after a run of what its government calls super-floods in 1998, 2004 and 2007, it has taken a further step on the descent into hell – with estimates of an extra million people living in the city as a result of the latest floods. The desperate crowds of people, mostly men, living by the roadsides on the outskirts of the city, begging

from passing traffic gave reality to the government's estimates.

This summer nearly half the country was flooded, and that, as always, included the country's most fertile land. In less dramatic times Bangladesh was a fertile country, the annual monsoon bringing rich minerals to its agricultural plains. Now the super-floods, which used to occur every 20 years or so, are drastically cutting the country's ability to feed itself. Huge areas of fertile riverbanks have disappeared. Small fish farms, a source of food and income for the many landless people in Bangladesh, were wiped out when the fish swam off in the floods. Rice paddies were drowned, making the price of rice seedlings for this year's planting beyond the reach of many small farmers.

It is overwhelming. Both the Bangladesh government and NGOs are working on projects to increase the ability of farmers to cope with these new weather conditions. At UK-based Practical Action's offices in Dhaka – staffed solely by Bangladeshis – I watched a video of the simple technology they are promoting to help people feed themselves even in the worst floods: crops planted on woven bamboo and water-hyacinth rafts that rise with the rising water, small, easy to handle fish cages that can be kept in flood water, and cheap concrete poles that raise houses above the flood plain.

I also learned about the government's efforts to promote similar raft gardens to rice farmers. It takes a good deal of optimism to feel hopeful about the ability of such technologies to make life bearable again for the millions made homeless by the floods. Yet, people are dedicating their lives to solving problems one small step at a time. There is little doubt the superfloods are the result of global warming caused by the well insulated. Whether we in our comfortable lives, well-wadded for the moment from the consequences of our choices, can be bothered to really do our part to solve these problems is the big question.



A bumper fish harvest in one of the communities in Bangladesh where Practical Action works.

Truth, t

Tackling the bad diets and lack of exercise of overweight young people has emerged as one of the hot topics for TV factual entertainment programmes. *The Food Magazine* investigates.

Programmes have a role to play in taking statistics and health promotion messages and making them interesting for audiences of millions, but some also attract criticism. Many campaigners and academics report regular approaches by television companies to participate in such programmes, but also report wariness of how the subject will be treated.

In a debate at the Sheffield International Festival of Documentary, set up by The Food Commission, panellists considered whether programmes such as *I Know What You Ate Last Summer* (Channel 5), *Honey We're Killing the Kids* (BBC3) and *Ian Wright's Unfit Kids* (Channel 4), play any genuinely useful role in improving public health and whether they are too quick to abandon ethical principles in the grab for audience share.

Jessica Mitchell, director of The Food Commission, joined Dominique Walker, commissioning editor at Channel 4 (C4) and producer of *Jamie's School Dinners*, and Laurence Turnbull, series producer of *Ian Wright's Unfit Kids*, in a debate that Mitchell hoped would, "Help me to understand the motives of programme makers a bit better. I tend to dislike these programmes so much while at the same time knowing it is important to get publicity for food and health issues. I worry I am too quick to criticise."

Programmes about overweight young people take a range of formats, but, when you have watched enough of them, many seem essentially similar. Overweight kids are shown eating junk food and lying around; an 'expert' presenter or voice-over tells us they are in a bad way but they can be helped if only they can stop being so self-indulgent; teens are put on some sort of self-help programme; they find it difficult and consider giving up; then they lose a bit of weight and say it has all been worth it.

So is there a problem? The kids lose weight, say they are happy and have participated with the permission of parents who are also able to view

Trust and tabloid TV

the programme before it is shown with some options if they wish to have it withdrawn for broadcast. Channels are not being sued and are staying on the right side of Ofcom's broadcasting regulations

Dominique Walker suggests that, at their best, programmes about important food issues such as childhood obesity can open doors into that world that people might not otherwise go through, "Factual entertainment programmes get to the heart of what really matters to us." Walker notes that unless a programme really does get to the heart, an important campaigning issue just is not enough to carry the audience along with it. For her, C4 is fulfilling its remit as a public service broadcaster but with a necessary eye on the need, "to commission programmes people want to watch."

Laurence Turnbull suggests that one difficulty is that, "Television seems to accelerate people's lives," and to pile on the pressure for them to confront their problems. That pressure can be, "destructive or cathartic." He notes that the participants in his series lost weight, got fitter, and in some cases did better in school as a result of new found confidence. For Turnbull, when that happens you do think it is, "OK to break eggs along the way."

Maybe it is the attitude to the 'breaking of eggs' that is so problematic. It was a sentiment echoed

Honey we're killing the kids, BBC3

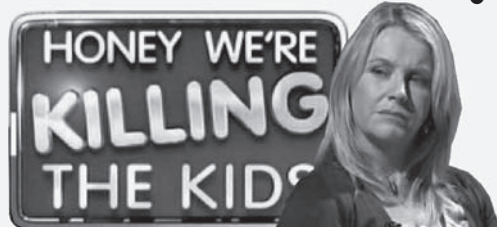
In this show a child psychology expert – whatever that means – takes parents into a room to watch a video simulation of their child aging to show how their 'ill' treatment of the child will knock years off his or her life. Parents and child then follow an improvement plan for a few weeks to show how they can add those years back.

In the edition we watched, we heard that the parents of seven year old, overweight, Michael, "claim to love him," but were taking 20

years off his life. As the parents see him age the mum notes that this is, "horrendous."

The ethical problems:

- Bad science and scare tactics – yes, obesity is a problem for society, but you cannot predict with any certainty that an overweight child will have decades taken off his life
- Not protecting participants – we hope young Michael did not watch the programme to hear his doom predicted or to hear his parents love for him questioned.



by all of the TV folk to some degree, including the session chairperson, Carolyn Payne, series producer of *Freaky Eaters*, who suggested that the public service benefit of such programmes to some extent over-rode concerns about how individuals are treated in programmes. Take me as an example she said, "I watched and decided to cycle to my appointment this afternoon."

None of the programme makers in the audience seemed unduly concerned by any of the programmes under discussion. But, concerns were raised about serious issues: that participants do not really know what they are getting into when they agree to filming; that TV itself and famous presenters can be a real temptation; that channels do now have procedures in place to look after participants,

but that mostly channels ensure they look after themselves with all legal angles covered. Perhaps, most interestingly, it is a general rule to leave the camera running in all situations – and to make ethical decisions about what to cut under pressure in the editing suite.

For Jessica Mitchell, "I understand programme makers a bit better, but feel no closer to liking the shows more or to thinking most have any public health benefit. I'd like to see a bit more humility, more awareness of what it might really mean to young people to have their personal lives so publicly revealed. The shows too often take the approach of blaming individuals and not the system that causes the problems."

Ian Wright's Unfit Kids

In his series, Ian Wright noted that he didn't know anything, "More important than what I'm doing," in helping young teens get fit. He is now using his association with the programme to promote Kellogg's Coco Rocks – a cereal that is high sugar, with the information on the box reminding us of his work with 'unfit kids.'

The ethical problems

- Transparency – are celebrity presenters getting involved in public health because they care or because it raises their public profile so they can make even more money?



More Ian Wright's Unfit Kids

In this series Ian Wright works with a group of young teens on an after school exercise programme over the course of some months. Wright attempts to get funding for such clubs for a national roll out.

Good idea, but shame that during the course of it, the programme nutritionist tells one boy he is going to kill himself by eating absolute rubbish and that he is a, "spoiled brat," for not immediately agreeing to her dietary suggestions. Wright visits one single mum and her son in a scene in which he tells them the child is in a bad way, at which point the mum shouts at her child, "Do you want to die," and then suggests if he does she could just throw him under a car. The scene goes on painfully long with the child watching his mum weep, and smoke, while asking him if he wants to die by the time he is 25.



The ethical problems

- End justifies the means – if a programme claims it is doing something incredibly important, well then, a bit of rough stuff with participants must be ok, right?
- Parental consent – if the parent allows this sort of filming, and then says ok to it being broadcast, does it really absolve the programme makers of responsibility?

Enzymes: the hidden extras

Enzymes are used in almost all aspects of modern food production. They modify the raw ingredients of the food we eat and the food itself. However, enzymes go unmentioned in ingredients lists and food manufacturers remain curiously shy about their use. Ian Tokelove reports.

As you read this, enzymes will be at work within your body. They act as catalysts, controlling chemical reactions involved in digestion, respiration and metabolism. Our own bodies produce many different types of enzyme, as do all living things, right down to the humblest mould and the smallest bacteria.

Enzymes are able to break down, or modify, chemical compounds such as starches and proteins. This ability has been utilised by humans for thousands of years. For example, using naturally enzyme-rich plant or animal matter, our ancestors produced cheese, bread and alcohol.

Perhaps the best known use of an enzyme in food production is rennet, traditionally derived from the stomach linings of young calves. Rennet contains enzymes that coagulate milk causing it to separate into solids (curds) and liquid (whey). The curds are then used for cheese production.

Enzyme production

Enzymes have traditionally been sourced from the tissues of plants and animals, where they occur naturally. However, microorganisms such as mould and fungi can also be used to produce vast quantities of enzymes. Some of these microorganisms produce the enzymes naturally, but many more have been genetically modified so that they produce 'copies' of animal or plant enzymes.

Microbial production has many advantages over plant and animal sources. The raw products required – the microorganisms and the substrate on which they feed – can be supplied wherever they are required. This frees companies from having to rely on a regular supply of enzyme-rich, plant or animal based materials, which may be expensive to collect and transport, and which will also need processing and purifying before use.

Bread

Whether you prefer a slice of white, a french baguette or a seed-encrusted granary loaf, almost all the commercially manufactured bread in the UK is made with enzymes.

Enzymes allow manufacturers to significantly pump up loaf volume, adjust texture, produce a better crust colour and

prolong shelf life. They make the dough easier to put through machines, increase dough stability and control 'crumb structure' – which in a sliced white loaf might be silky and uniform, but in a baguette may be chewy and variable, with large holes. Enzymes can even give bread a whiter appearance.

What most of us would recognise as a modern loaf would be impossible to produce without enzymes. But what does all this mean for the consumer? Andrew Whitley, an artisanal baker and writer, warns that some enzymes are potential allergens, notably the very widely used alpha-amylase (used in baking to break starches down into sugars, for yeast to feed on). Bakery workers can become sensitised

to enzymes from bread improvers, and industry experts warn that liquid or granular preparations of enzymes are safer than powdered forms, because of the allergenic potential of enzyme dust. This should not be a problem to the end consumer if enzymes are destroyed during processing, but Whitley has quoted research from the University of Bochum, in Germany, which shows that up to 20% of the allergenicity of alpha-amylase can survive in the crusts of bread.

Whitley has also revealed that an enzyme called transglutaminase, which may be used to make dough stretchier in croissants and some breads, may render part of the wheat protein toxic to people with a severe gluten intolerance. Such unintended and unanticipated effects suggest that the safety testing of some enzymes may not be up to scratch, and raises the possibility of other, as yet unnoticed, side affects. However, unless enzymes are fully labelled on ingredients lists, it will be virtually impossible to correlate possible side effects in the general population with enzyme use.

Enzymes and the law

Enzymes are not listed as food ingredients because they are regarded as 'processing aids', which do not have to be mentioned on food labels. A processing aid is a substance added during food processing for technical reasons, but which has no function (e.g. flavour, colour, preservation) in the final food product.

Most enzymes are also inactivated (broken down) during processing and are no longer technically active in the final product, although a residue will often remain.

However, enzymes have hugely important functional roles *during* food processing. They are used specifically to affect flavour, texture, aroma, colour, and many other food qualities – often dramatically.

Despite their widespread use in the UK, there is little specific legislation regarding the use of enzymes. Throughout the EU they are regulated as processing aids, covered by laws which vary from country to country. In the UK there is no list of 'permitted' enzymes, although enzymes must be considered safe under General European Commission (EC) Food Law. It is worth noting that there is neither safety evaluation nor authorisation of food enzymes at European level, except for those that are considered as food additives (of which there are just two enzymes, E1103 and E1105).

In July 2006, an EC proposal on the regulation of food enzymes pointed out that rapid advances in production technology has resulted in, "more complex and sophisticated," enzymes which could cause, "potential hazards arising from their chemical nature and source such as allergenicity, activity-related toxicity, residual microbiological activity, and chemical toxicity."

The EC proposal, which has yet to be formally approved, would seek to create a harmonised list of food enzymes, following safety evaluation by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The proposal says that, "all food enzymes and their use in food will be evaluated for safety, technological need, benefit to the consumer and (to ensure) that the consumer is not being misled by their use." As with food additives, terms such as these can be subject to very loose interpretation by both the food industry and its regulators. Even after approval, we won't see enzymes appearing on food labels, as they will still be regarded as 'processing aids'.

Assuming the proposal is accepted, companies will be allowed a period of two years to submit data for evaluation, so we are unlikely to see any progress until after 2010.

in almost everything we eat

GM enzymes

The majority of enzymes appear to be produced using genetically modified microorganisms, but with no public access to the food industry's secret files, it is impossible to know which enzymes are used where. Perhaps surprisingly, we can be sure that almost all vegetarian cheese has been produced using enzymes from GM microorganisms. The GM process is approved by the Vegetarian Society, who regard it, in this instance, as a preferable alternative to the wholesale slaughter of calves.

The only way to avoid GM produced enzymes is to purchase organic food, as organic standards completely forbid all use of GM ingredients or derivatives.

Cheese production

Enzymes are essential to cheese production. They act by coagulating milk, allowing the 'solid' curds to be separated from the 'watery' whey. The curds are then pressed and matured to produce cheese. Traditionally the enzymes would have come from the stomach linings of young calves, where they are naturally produced to enable the calf to digest its mother's milk. Commercially produced preparations of standardised, enzyme-rich matter for cheese production were first made in Denmark in 1874.

Today, over half of the enzymes used in UK cheese production are microbial in origin. The enzymes are produced from genetically modified (GM) yeast and moulds which contain copies of the calf gene for the production of chymosin, the main enzyme involved in milk clotting.

Bone cleaning and meat extracts

Modern food production can be extremely efficient. When it comes to meat production, nothing is left to waste. Cattle and pig bones are turned into gelatine, a standard ingredient in jellies, chewy sweets and many desserts. Before the bones can be processed they must be cleaned, and to do this enzymes can be used.

The bones are first crushed and mixed with hot water. Enzyme preparations with names such as NeutraseTM, AlcalaseTM, EsperaseTM or FlavourzymeTM are then added singly or in combination and the 'bone soup' is stirred so that the enzymes can get to work. The enzymes break down the meat protein which is still sticking to the bones, and this dissolves into the water around it.

The cleaned bones are used for gelatine production and the protein solution is extracted for use as a flavour enhancer in processed meat products, soups, sauces and snack foods. This 'hydrolysed protein' should be listed in the ingredients list, although you will not be able to tell how it was produced. Similar protein extraction processes can be used for plant based protein – for example, the production of soya milk from soya beans.

Fake meat

Some meat just isn't meat anymore. If you choose to buy your meat in processed form, sliced and shaped and 'ready to eat' it is worth a close look at the ingredients label. Alongside added water you may find other, unexpected, meat ingredients, such as chicken in your ham. Other proteins may also be added, such as soy, casein and gluten. Food manufacturers use a small arsenal of food additives to bind all these ingredients together, but new enzymatic technology may also be giving them a helping hand.

For instance, an enzyme called transglutaminase (produced by microorganisms) can be used to 'cross-link' these proteins, sticking them together. The food industry refers to this as a 'food adhesive'.

An alternative (and yuckier) enzymatic method has also been described in which plasma is taken from cow blood. The plasma is 'activated' by an enzyme which encourages the plasma to clot, just as our blood coagulates and clots over a wound. As the plasma clots, cross-linkages are formed between the different proteins, binding them together. Tasty!

Fruit and vegetable juices

If you thought that your fruit juice had been 'freshly squeezed' and that was all, you may need to think again. Enzymes have been routinely used in fruit juice production since the 1950s. One of the very first commercial enzymatic products was Pectinol K, launched in 1938 and used in the production of clear apple juice.

Juice manufacturers want to extract as much juice as they can from fruit or vegetables, and enzymes can help them to break the fruit structure down, releasing more juice. UK fruit juice regulations allow three types of enzymes to be used: pectolytic enzymes, proteolytic enzymes and amylolytic enzymes.

Enzymes have several other functions in fruit juice production. They can be used to clarify and prevent clouding in juices, and modern ultrafiltration processing (the use of very fine filters to remove solid matter) is highly reliant on enzymes, which are used to completely break down pectin and starch solids, and to remove blockages that form on the costly filtration membranes.

Juices are heat treated before being sold, and this inactivates the enzymes, although their remnants invariably make it into the final product.

Ready peeled fruit

An orange comes with its own perfect packaging, but that has not stopped food companies from selling us pre-peeled oranges and other such fruit, plastic wrapped for our 'convenience' or mixed into 'ready to eat' fruit cocktails. Removing the skin of such fruit by hand is time consuming, messy and can damage the fruit, but enzymes can provide a high-tech, quick-fix and cheap answer to the problem.

The peel is scored and the fruit is then immersed in a solution of the enzyme pectinase. This is followed by an 'infusion' stage where the solution is forced deep into the fruit using low or high pressure processes. After one to two hours the enzyme will have got to work on the fruit and the skin can be easily peeled off, and the segments easily separated without damage.

■ An extended version of this article can be found at www.foodcomm.org.uk/latest_news.htm

■ The publication *Enzymes in Food Technology*, Whitehurst & Law, ISBN 0 8493 9782 0 was of use in researching this article.

Making the slice right

A new, Real Bread Campaign is being started by Andrew Whitley of Bread Matters and Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming. The campaign aims to increase the enjoyment, production and consumption of bread made with natural ingredients, appropriate fermentation and no adulterants (such as industrially produced enzymes) so that good bread may play a larger part in the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the nation. ■ www.realbreadcampaign.org



Everyone deserves a ‘Living Wage’

Recently, some publicity was given to a decision by the hotel chain Hilton UK to review its contracts with firms that supply its room cleaners. The employment practices of these firms, including the low wages they pay, were highlighted by West London Citizens (WLC), an alliance of active citizens and community organisations that campaigns on a range of issues including the Living Wage.

Hilton did not go easily to that decision – WLC and its members, including low waged workers, persuaded them. In one action this year, at the Hilton Metropole in Edgware, London, they took a three pronged approach: they managed to put leaflets in bedrooms letting guests know about the low wages paid to room cleaners; they had well dressed activists ‘infiltrate’ an event at the hotel where they talked to guests about employment conditions, and they had a demonstration outside.

WLC is part of the wider London Citizens network – a coalition that The Food Commission has been doing some research for recently, specifically to support a project considering the impact of low waged employment on workers’

health, nutrition and living conditions. Interviews have been done with hospital domestics and hotel cleaners, some on the minimum wage and others with wages at or just above the London Living Wage of £7.20 an hour.

The research is not yet finished, but what we have found, so far, are people who work in physically demanding jobs, for long hours, at very low wages for years on end without respite. As one hospital domestic noted, “This is forever for me.” They do jobs that are essential to keep London running and yet get very little appreciation for this.

Single people told us they feed themselves on around £20 a week and juggle this with high costs for housing and transportation. One cleaner told us, “I cook a lot of soups – vegetable, barley – they taste good and are cheap.” Others mentioned that they call on family in a pinch and go without meals to save. At one of the meetings we had, no one would eat the cake and biscuits put out as a snack, as one person said, “I can’t usually afford those things, so I don’t like to get in the habit of eating them.”

The research has provided some evidence of how the move from a minimum wage to the Living Wage enables people to make improvements in their diets, purchasing a wider range of fresh food, for example, and in their lives – the two things are not divisible. The people we have spoken to are on low wages – but they still need to socialise, have the odd cake and let go of some of the stress that always counting the pennies brings to life.

It is also about pride, as hospital domestic assistant Martin Grant noted, “Another staff member called me a two bob cleaner and as a union rep I will take action. I am proud of the job we do, no one degrades me or puts me down. We work so hard and the hospital couldn’t manage without us. Managers take big bucks but it has taken us a long time to get the wages we deserve.”



Three of over 1,000 people who came to a recent West London Citizens assembly to campaign on the Living Wage. Photo by ChrisJepson.com

How big is a bowl of cereal?

In one sense it doesn’t matter how large a standard bowl of cereal is because we each of us select our own serving and eat what we want. But, when it comes to nutrition labelling the question of a standard size becomes much more important, because we need to compare products to choose the healthier item.

The food industry has decided it cannot abide the Food Standards Agency’s (FSA) traffic light scheme for comparing products, based on a common standard of a 100 gram (g) portion.

Instead, it has come up with ‘GDA’ labelling schemes, where it tells you how much of an average person’s guideline daily amount of each nutrient is contained in a portion. Not only is there a problem with the ‘average person’ (none of us is

average) but there is an even greater problem with portions. Put simply, the industry cannot agree what a portion should be (see boxes below).

Most tellingly, the portions suggested by manufacturers are nearly always less than people actually consume! The FSA recently reported results from a survey showing that actual amounts of breakfast cereals eaten were far adrift from the companies’ standard servings.

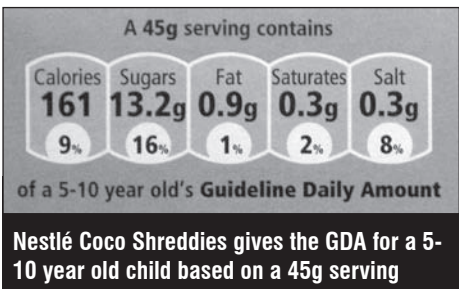
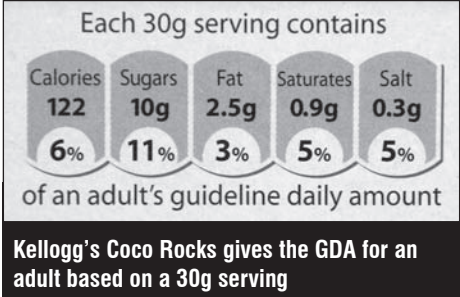
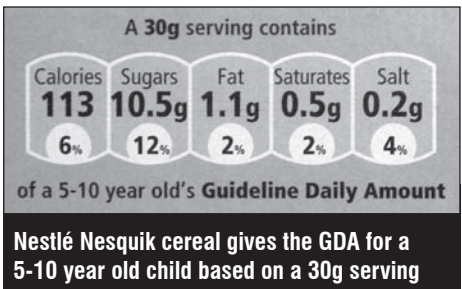
	Company portion	Actual serving
Corn Flakes	30g	55g
Coco-Pops	30g	70g
Cheerios	30g	50g
Muesli	50g	125g

And as a footnote to this whole soggy saga, the people in the survey said that what they really wanted was information per 100g of dry cereal, so that they could quickly see as they walked down the cereal aisle which product was the healthiest. Quite.

■ Tim Lobstein, with research by Lindsay Rodrigues



Three similar packs of cereal, with three different GDA labels, making comparison almost impossible. All of these cereals are high sugar and medium salt and would merit clear ‘red’ and ‘amber’ light signals under the FSA’s traffic light labelling scheme.



Delicious & Nutritious: Healthy home cooking for older people

Terry Tucker, Simon and Schuster UK Ltd,
ISBN: 10: 1-847-37054-3. £10.99

It is estimated that one in ten people aged over 65 and living in the community are malnourished, so in being asked to review this book, I thought

great, an interesting way of addressing food issues among older people who for many reasons may have lost interest in cooking. Not since Louise Davies' sorely missed *Easy Cooking For One* has an author considered the budgeting,

cooking and practical issues for older people, often living alone and cooking for themselves, as well as providing simple, delicious and easy recipes.

Sadly 'Delicious & Nutritious' is not quite the book to take on this mantle. Produced by care home provider Barchester from their own chef academy and designed to reflect their strongly stated commitment to producing high quality,

tasty and nutritious food, there are many things to recommend this book, but not for older people living at home. Despite its title, it is aimed squarely at the care homes market.

It certainly looks fabulous and includes a healthy take on many traditional meals as well as favourites from the residents of Barchester's homes. The recipes themselves are clearly presented, easy to follow and include nutritional information. But it's in the recipes where we hit a snag. The measures are given in options of cooking for four or ten people. How many older people do you know who live with nine others? In fact, the majority of older households in the UK have only one or two members, meaning this book is just not relevant.

In terms of additional information, the 'how to spot malnutrition' section is very welcome and aimed at those working with older people, if only the same could be said for the very brief section on nutrition. I'm of the belief that there is much misinformation on nutrition and what we should really be talking about for older people is eating a variety of and enjoying food, not what a protein is for. Particularly true if the nutrition information given is sketchy at best and down right confusing, as is the case here.

So, if you're an older person looking for quick and easy recipes, there are lots of cheaper and better cookbooks out there.

■ Lisa Wilson, Food Access Network,
www.sustainweb.org

Old and hungry

The Government recently announced plans for a 'Health in pregnancy grant' that would award women one-off payments to help them purchase healthier foods. Now, the National Carers Forum (NCF) is calling for a similar grant to be provided to the elderly population.

The charity, Help the Aged, reports that pensioners are spending around £21.50 a week on food – not enough money to purchase the varied diet the organisation recommends. That healthy diet includes foods rich in omega 3, vitamin D, calcium, zinc and foods rich in lutein, which protects against cataracts, such as red grapes, kiwis, green peppers, and spinach.

According to a study from the European Nutrition for Health Alliance, the health effects resulting from under-nutrition in older people are costing the UK nearly £7.5 billion a year.

The NCF has set up a petition on the No.10 website to call for extra money for pensioners, "to make sure our more vulnerable members of society are given a helping hand to eat better, fresh food to enhance their quality of life." The organisation notes that too many pensioners are just barely, "making do."

■ To support the NCF campaign visit <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/freshfruitveg>

The Last Food of England

Marwood Yeatman, Ebury Press, 473pp, £25 (hardback) ISBN: 978-0-09-191397-7

There has been a lot of ink spilled in the cause of local food in the last few years. The Slow Food movement has been exhorting us to discover produce that is closer to home. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's multimedia smallholding empire has championed the cause of seasonal, local and organic produce. Rick Stein has been travelling the country finding 'food heroes' who valiantly uphold local food traditions, and Graham Harvey, whose day job is to be agricultural story editor of *The Archers*, has promoted traditional, local produce from the point of view of its superior nutritional content and symbiosis with the landscape.

So, given that farmers' markets are springing up everywhere and new 'niche' producers of artisanal English produce are setting up shop in the countryside, is there anything else worth saying on the subject? Aren't we all local food converts now?

Sure, a certain slice of the English food-enthusiast demographic may now be 'turned on' to dry-cured bacon from rare-breed pigs, raw

milk or fine sustainable seafood. But, it doesn't do any harm to know more. Marwood Yeatman's book is more than just the usual lament for lost gastronomic splendour, although it does contain plenty of that. Yeatman clearly got through a lot of shoe leather travelling the country to compile his many captivating food stories and one in particular resonated with me: he was served 'duck and muffin' (a superior stew on toast) at a shop in the north which, when he revisited it, had predictably disappeared. I was reminded of my father's stories of old Lancashire pub food, brawn in oatcakes, and wondered again why such simple, excellent – and entirely local – fast-food items have been forgotten.

Yeatman examines the causes for the decline of our native cuisine in a chapter entitled 'The English clearances'. Most of the usual suspects are mentioned: industrial agriculture, supermarkets, health-faddism – and of course food writers such as Elizabeth David who, by elevating Mediterranean gastronomy at the expense of our own, did much to divert public attention from the food delights in the next village.

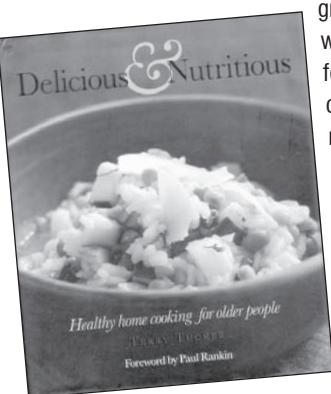
As we continue to worship food produced by French 'paysans' (whilst, as Yeatman points

out, using the English word 'peasant' as an insult) the rest of the world is, ironically, snapping up our finest food. The Japanese,

Yeatman notes, will cross the world for English produce. Yet we will pay huge sums for acorn-fed Spanish ham whilst the fine acorn-fed porkers of the New Forest cannot find a market.

And this is the point of Yeatman's book. He is not asking us to return to a rosy, cosy past. He's simply gone to great pains to observe and report the superb traditions of husbandry and technique which make English ingredients – beef, lamb, cheese, fruit – amongst the world's best. Reading this book makes you proud of England's food and fires the enthusiasm to go out and find it again.

■ Paul Waddington is the author of *Seasonal Food and 21st-Century Smallholder* (Eden Project Books/Transworld)



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.

It has been a busy few months at the ASA, with several leading food manufacturers getting told off for misleading the public. Of course, by the time the ASA takes action, the adverts have usually run their course and the public have already been misled. Misbehaving companies do not get fined and do not have to apologise, but at least we can let you know what they have been up to.

X Dairylea Lunchables not “packed with good stuff”

Kraft Foods reformulated their children's Dairylea Lunchables range, and claimed that their Lunchables sandwiches, which many would consider to be an additive-ridden parody of real sandwiches, were, “packed with good stuff.” These are the same long-life, pre-packed sandwiches that won a Parents Jury award five years ago for being, “the worst food targeted at children's lunchboxes.” Admittedly, Kraft have managed to reduce the saturated fat and salt content, but as the ASA pointed out, the product *still* contains high levels of saturated fat and salt. The ASA concluded that the ad breached CAP Code clauses 3.1 (Substantiation) and 7.1 (Truthfulness), from which one might infer that Kraft Foods were basically lying to us.

X Special K Sustain doesn't “keep you satisfied for longer”

Kellogg's got rapped over the knuckles for a TV ad which said that, “Delicious new Special K Sustain contains extra protein and fibre. See if it can keep you satisfied for longer.” Unfortunately, it turns out that Special K Sustain contains *less* protein than a cheaper pack of bog standard Special K. In its defence, Kellogg's stated that Special K Sustain contained 5.6g of protein per 40g serving, in comparison to 4.5g of protein per 30g serving for Special K original. But, as the ASA pointed out, you cannot go around comparing 40g servings with 30g servings. If served up in the same size bowls, normal Special K contains more protein than Special K Sustain every time. Kellogg's were told not to broadcast the ad again.

X Innocent Superfoods Smoothies not so super

A national press ad for Innocent Superfoods Smoothies stated, “When we were inventing our natural detox superfoods smoothie, we figured we should use super berries from super trees, not weird artificial boosters from strange laboratories. So we blended acai with equally incredible pomegranates and blueberries to produce a recipe that contains even more antioxidants than the average five a day. We think it's the world's superest smoothie recipe. Hope you like it too.”

When challenged, Innocent claimed that the fruit in their product contained high levels of antioxidants which, “neutralised,” the free radicals that could damage the body's cells. They said that, “soaking up,” free radicals in this way detoxified the body of free radicals.

The ASA disagreed and said that, “neutralising,” or, “soaking up,” free radicals did not amount to removing toxins from the body. The ASA pointed out that the best way to reduce the number of toxins in the body's system is to simply drink plenty of water and cut back on alcohol consumption.

When it came to Innocent's claim that their recipe, “contains even more antioxidants than the average five a day,” the ASA also found the evidence wanting, and pointed out that the study on which Innocent based their claim stressed the importance of eating a variety of fruit and vegetables (rather than glugging on a smoothie).

The ASA also made clear that the accepted nutritional advice is that fruit juice and smoothies can count towards only one of the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, no matter how much was consumed.

X Four cups of tea – an easy way to health?

The United Kingdom Tea Council (UKTC) got into hot water for a series of posters which said that, “4 cups a day can contribute to a diet rich in antioxidants which could help to protect your body against the damaging effects of free radicals.”

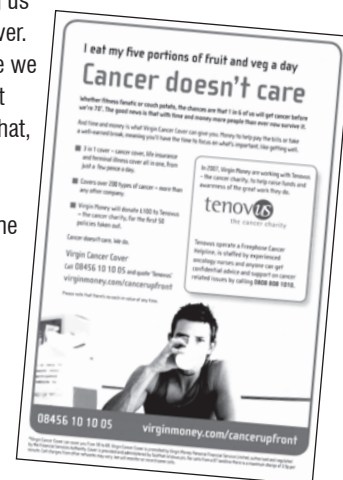
The ASA found that one poster exaggerated the health benefits of drinking tea, because it associated drinking four cups of tea a day with the Government's recognised ‘five portions of fruit and vegetables a day’ campaign. The posters also misleadingly implied the advice was part of a health campaign by a Government department or similar authority and did not make clear that the ads were by the United Kingdom Tea Council. The ASA also agreed with a complainant who thought that the overall implication that tea was healthy was misleading, because it was contradicted by the smaller text, which clarified that antioxidants in tea only, “could,” help to protect against free radicals.

The original ads ran back in October 2006, on the London Underground network, and are estimated to have been viewed by 8.5 million people. It may have taken the ASA almost a year to form a judgement on these ads, but their message was clear, UKTC must not, “imply in future campaigns that there was an established health benefit, in terms of antioxidant potential, to be had from drinking four cups of tea per day.”

X Five a day? Cancer doesn't care

Food Magazine reader Lindsay Wakeman alerted us to a highly questionable advert from Virgin Money, published in a Virgin newsletter. “I eat my five portions of fruit and veg a day,” says a young, healthy looking man. “Cancer doesn't care,” replies Virgin, before attempting to flog us Virgin Cancer Cover. Just to make sure we have got the point they emphasise that, “Cancer doesn't care. We do.”

We thought the ad contradicted healthy eating advice, because the consumption of fruit and veg does reduce the likelihood of a number of cancers. The ASA agreed with us on this point, but reckoned the ad was okay because the advert is not about, “preventing cancer,” but is, “aimed at those who contract cancer and need practical financial help.” The ASA pointed out that, “anyone can contract cancer regardless of lifestyle,” which is true, but those five portions of fruit and veg really can reduce the chances of cancer, an important message that Virgin appear to be taking too lightly.



■ For more information see the World Cancer Research Fund UK's *Recommendations for Cancer Prevention* at www.wcrf-uk.org



We welcome letters from our readers but we do sometimes have to edit them so that we can include as many as possible (our apologies to the authors). Write to The Editor, *The Food Magazine*, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF or email to letters@foodcomm.org.uk

Organics and slavery?

I am a new subscriber and have enjoyed reading *The Food Magazine*. In the 'Kids against cocoa slavery' article in FM78 you recommend buying fair trade chocolate such as Divine, Oxfam and Green and Black's, noting that "Green and Black's was taken over by Cadbury Schweppes in 2005 but retains its fair trade status."

Many customers do not realise (as I didn't until recently) that of all Green and Black's wide range of chocolates, only Maya Gold carries the fair trade mark. The other varieties, though organic, are not fair trade certified.

Terri Trimble, by email

Thank you for pointing this out Terri, many of us would assume that 'organic' also means 'fair trade.' Just out of interest, we contacted the Soil Association (SA) to check on employment practices within organic agriculture. We were not expecting to find slavery permitted and indeed, the SA confirmed that all organic producers must comply with International Labour Law. So Green and Black's is still a good choice if you are concerned about child slavery on cocoa plantations.

Air freight and organics

I wonder what you think of the decision by the Soil Association to require that, in future, organic, air-freighted products must also be fair trade. Shouldn't they just have stopped certifying these products now if they aren't good for the environment?

Gilles Mordant, Paris

It is a difficult issue, trying to reconcile people's livelihoods with environmental impacts. But, we are happy with the decision of the Soil Association's Standards Board that in future, air freighted organic food will need to meet either their own Ethical Trade standards or the Fairtrade Foundation's standards. We think it would be a

Diet Coke, a 'little plus' or a little minus?

These days it can be very confusing for the general public to tell what is the right thing to eat, with 'healthy eating' messages becoming blurred. Many people think that 'low fat' means healthy, even though such products can be full of sugar. I understand their difficulty in understanding the 'eat healthy' message.

But I was still shocked to see a new product called Diet Coke with vitamins and minerals. Surely a product like this should not be allowed.

Dr Leslie Borrill, Loughborough

There is no law against selling fortified products like this one, although we do think there should be much tighter rules regarding claims on labels. Health is a lucrative market these days. Consumers want their food and drink to be healthy, and companies like Coca-Cola are not going to miss out on a trend like that, especially when there is money to be made.

Coca-Cola had enough sense not to add vitamins to their core product, the sugary Coca-Cola that come with over ten teaspoons of sugar in a single, 500ml bottle. They knew they would have a battle making that look healthy. But Diet Coke was ripe for fortification with vitamins – after all, it was already 'sugar free', which is enough to make a product look healthy these days (the fact that the product is also pretty much 'nutrition free' does not seem to make much difference).

mistake to just take a decision to stop certifying all air freighted products.

The plans are being phased in gradually, and will not be mandatory until 2011 so it gives producers time to get up to speed. As part of the changes, licensees will also need to draw up plans for reducing dependence on air freight.

Many producers in developing countries rely on income from products exported to the UK and were encouraged to go into business by buyers here. Surely it would have been wrong to just abandon them now we have decided that there are more important priorities. We really believe that we must be one world together fighting climate change and its effects, and part of that will mean acting in solidarity with people in developing countries to make changes.

Frozen or chilled

Please find enclosed some packaging from prawns I found in a chiller cabinet with 'Previously Frozen' on the back. I hope you can get something from this, as a consumer I think the supermarkets should be a lot straighter with us

Diet Coke Plus comes in two variants, one has a sprinkling of vitamins B3, B12 and C, and the other, pictured here, contains 0.1% green tea (that's a whopping one third of a gram per bottle) and a dusting of vitamin C.

According to Coca-Cola it is 'a little plus for today's hectic lifestyle' suggesting that their target audience of women in their 20s and 30s are so incredibly busy that they must imbibe nutrition in the form of fizzy drinks, rather than eat a proper meal.

The problem with products like these, and there are lots of them, is that they supply only a very small part of our nutritional requirements. We know we need B vitamins, and vitamin C, but fortified soft drinks and the like cannot provide the whole host of nutrients, vitamins, minerals and other micronutrients which the body needs.

They sell well because, regardless of the facts, they make people feel like they are making a 'healthy' choice every time they buy one. So they buy them and tell themselves they are 'eating healthily'. Personally, we'll stick with a bowl of fruit from the local market, it's cheaper and it's healthier.

– if I wanted frozen prawns I'd have gone to the freezer cabinet. Or, I want a clear notice on the so-called Fresh Fish chiller where I found these to state which products were previously frozen.

Linda Beaney, Guestling, Sussex

It had passed us by too that items on sale from supermarket chiller shelves may have been previously frozen. But, this is entirely legal, so long as the label states it. The problem is, as you found, people often do not look for this information because they do not expect chilled products to have been frozen. We also had to hunt quite hard to find the information on the products we looked at. In our quick search we found many products that had been previously frozen including doughnuts on the bakery counter. These products do not include a freezing date – so it is impossible to tell when meat and fish products were caught or doughnuts baked.

Whilst food manufacturers are not operating outside the law, *The Food Magazine* believes we are being short changed by supermarkets selling previously frozen food in the guise of chilled produce.



New fruitier taste, what's the catch?

Chivers Hartley, manufacturer of Hartley's jellies, have come up with a great way of making their jellies even fruitier – they have removed all the fruit.

The jellies are clearly 'fruitier' because every packet is emblazoned with a logo which shouts 'New Fruitier Taste' – but the jellies no longer contain the 5% juice from concentrate which they used to. Those of you with eagle eyes may also notice that the image of fruit has been dropped from the new style packaging (top) as it would be illegal to use such imagery in a product that is devoid of actual fruit.

The jelly is still called 'Raspberry flavour jelly' because it is totally legal to call something 'Raspberry flavour jelly' even if it does not contain any raspberries. Stupid, we know, but that is the law.

The reformulated packet says it contains 'no artificial flavours' – so we know the flavouring is natural. But what does that mean? If the packet said it contained 'raspberry flavouring' we could tell that the flavouring had been isolated solely (or almost solely) from actual raspberries, but there is no mention of raspberry here.



All we can tell is that the flavouring came from material that was either vegetable or animal in origin (i.e. practically anything). That material would have been processed via distillation, solvent extraction, enzymatic or microbiological methods. Any nutritional benefits will have been removed. The resulting 'flavour' ends up in our kids' jellies, and the money saved ends up in Chivers Hartley's pockets. Thanks Hartley's.

■ Our thanks to Miss MD Yates for bringing this product to our attention.

Seasonal Tipp-Ex

Not quite sure that this 'Seasonal' shelf at a London Somerfield is up to. We visited the store in September – so maybe that's why we found back to school materials including notebooks and Tipp-Ex. School products were side by side with barbecue fluid, perhaps with late season outdoor cooking in mind. There were many chocolate tins and bars with the message to – buy early for Christmas. Perhaps the shelf refers to the breakfast cereals just to the left – do Kellogg's do a seasonal cornflake? Over on the fruit and veg aisle there was, sadly, no mention of season at all.



HotBodz

Hot bodz candy for young girls – don't get us started on this one – maybe the company's next range should be Big D**kz – aimed at the male chief execs of sweet manufacturing companies.



Life's too short

I can think of a lot of things that life is too short for, but peeling a carrot isn't one of them. It was one of the few things I could actually do with any ease in the kitchen when I was a kid and it still brings back nice memories. And carrots are such a lovely colour, it's nice to have them in my hands. What else might I do with those quiet moments that would better serve my life? Can't think of a thing.



Farmers' Market in a can

Farmers' Markets have been a huge success story in the UK. There are now over 500 markets around the country, offering consumers the opportunity to meet farmers, growers and producers in person. All of the produce on sale will have been grown, reared, caught, brewed, pickled, baked, smoked or processed by the stallholders themselves.

The markets are certified by FARMA, the National Farmers' Retail & Markets Association, to ensure you are buying the freshest, most local produce possible, supporting your local community and economy, and helping the environment by reducing food-miles.

So what are Heinz doing offering a range of Farmers' Market soups? We wish we could report that the corporate giant has suddenly

started sourcing its ingredients from Farmers' Markets, but in truth Heinz has simply chosen to exploit the hard work of the thousands of people who run the markets, by nicking the unprotected name for its own commercial gain. FARMA have accused Heinz of, "blatant commercial exploitation," and have asked consumers to boycott the range.

Meanwhile, Heinz have disingenuously claimed they, "don't believe there was anything confusing or misleading about the labelling," and the cans continue to be sold.



■ For a real taste of a Farmers' Market go to www.farmersmarkets.net