

The

# FOOD MAGAZINE

**Campaigning for safer, healthier food**

Published by The Food Commission

Issue 34 ♦ Jul/Sep 1996 ♦ £3.50

## Lindane found in

## residues in milk

**The pesticide lindane, banned in several countries, has been detected in nearly half of the UK milk supply.**

One pint in every 24 of the UK's milk supply contains amounts of the pesticide lindane above the maximum recommended level, and MAFF has ordered an investigation.

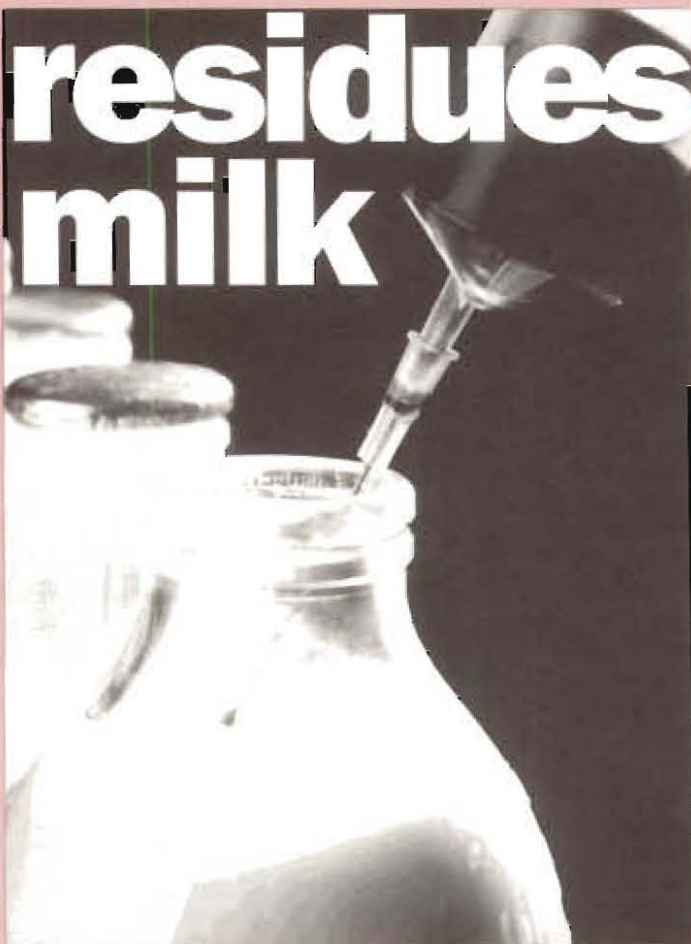
Researchers have linked lindane to a range of problems, including breast cancer, and the chemical is currently the target of a campaign by the trade union Unison to have it banned. The MAFF survey of milk products found 99 samples out of 216 to contain lindane, with nine samples above the Maximum Residue Limit — the level triggering an investigation. This level is not considered to be hazardous, and the junior minister Angela Browning

assured consumers that the residue levels were low enough for the products 'to be eaten safely by consumers their entire lives'.

Lindane is used mainly for soil treatment for rape, wheat, turnips, swedes and winter barley, sprayed on some two million acres. It is banned in 14 countries (including Sweden and the Netherlands) and severely restricted in many others.

In two samples of milk the pesticide DDT was detected, even though the chemical has been banned in the UK for over a decade.

■ More details: Pesticides Trust, tel 0171 274 8895; Unison (Sarah Copsey) tel 0171 388 2366.



**stop press...stop press...stop press...stop press...stop press...stop press...stop press...stop press**

## Drinks survey shows excess saccharin use



The Food Commission has obtained details of tests by Surrey County Council of 316 soft drinks which found nearly one in twelve (25) to contain levels of saccharin above the legal maximum. The majority did not declare themselves to be low calorie, reduced sugar or diet drinks, and in all but three cases, those with excess saccharin also contained other artificial sweeteners, or sugar, or both.

The survey comes on top of concern expressed by government advisers that — in the light of a survey of children conducted in 1993 — the proportion of children likely to

exceed the Acceptable Daily Intake levels for saccharin was too high, and that warning notices should be put on squashes telling parents to increase the dilution for younger children. No such warning was recommended for ready-to-drink products, but the new data from Surrey Council shows that ready-to-drink brands are just as likely to contain excess saccharin.

The products found by analysts to be exceeding the statutory limits include leading brands and supermarket own-label drinks.

■ For more details see pages 6-7.

**Get the facts with The Food Magazine**

THE  
**FOOD**  
COMMISSION

*Publishers of The Food Magazine*

The Food Magazine is published quarterly by The Food Commission, a national non-profit organisation campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food. We rely entirely on our supporters, allowing us to be completely independent, taking no subsidy from the government, the food industry or advertising.

We aim to provide independently researched information on the food we eat to ensure good quality food for all.

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

*Co-directors:* Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein  
*Information Officer:* Mary Whiting  
*Research Officers:* Jane Bradbury, Vivien Lund, Alice Furniss, Sabine Durand-Gasslein

*Office & Subscriptions Administrator:* Ian Tokelove  
*Food Irradiation Campaign Officer:* Martine Drake

*Editorial Advisors:*

Joanna Blythman, Dr Eric Brunner Tracey Clunies-Ross, Prof Michael Crawford, Derek Cooper, Alan Gear Robin Jenkins, Prof Tim Lang Suzi Leather, Dr Alan Long, Jeanette Longfield, Dr Erik Millstone, Dr Melanie Miller, Charlotte Mitchell Dr Mike Nelson, Dr Mike Rayner, Dr Aubrey Sheiham, Iona Smeaton Simon Wright

■ Issue 34 of The Food Magazine July - September 1996. ISSN 0953-5047

■ Typesetting and design by Ian Tokelove of the Food Commission and Sarah Dobinson of Artworkers, 1a Berry Place, Sebastian Street, London EC1V 0JD.

■ Printed by Spider Web, 14-20 Sussex Way, London N7 6RS. ■ Printed on recycled paper except centre section.

■ Retail distribution by Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN. ■ Unless otherwise indicated all items are the copyright © The Food Commission (UK) Ltd 1995 and are not to be reproduced without written permission. ■ The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Food Commission

**The Food Commission (UK) Ltd**  
3rd Floor, 5-11 Worship Street, London  
EC2A 2BH  
Telephone: 0171 628 7774  
Fax: 0171 628 0817

## Food scares? Or a sign of the times?

### 'There is no scientific evidence of any risk to health.' Sounds familiar?

Such a phrase is greeted with some cynicism by consumers, who are repeatedly told that beef is safe, baby milk is safe, and — as we report on the front page — that the lindane in milk is safe to consume.

We cannot predict the future, but we know that such stories will continue to run and run. We know this because the cause of the horror stories remains in place. Food scares do not fall out of the sky. They develop from real problems in food production and food promotion: problems which emerge because of the short term economics and narrow scientific basis on which the industry is built.

BSE came from intensive farming and animal feed practices based on a reductionist philosophy which sees the animal kingdom as material to be exploited, rather than as part of our ecology to be cherished. Phthalates are found in mass-produced baby milk powder, a food product based on the same reductionist view that believes it can replicate mother's milk.

Lindane in our milk reflects the chemical abuse of the plant kingdom and the soil on which it is based. Genetic escapes into the environment (see page 3) are becoming an accepted risk of the biotechnology industry: another industry based on reductionist principles that ignore the interactive nature of the world, and which give priority to short term economic gains.

Even the artificial sweeteners we feature in this issue, aspartame and saccharin (see pages 6-8), are not free of possible health hazards, at least for a minority of people. Additives like these are added to food and drink in ever-increasing quantities... in mixtures or 'cocktails' whose complex interactive effects are never fully explored.

Food 'scares' will continue to emerge as long as food production continues the way it does. Just a week before the BSE crises blew up in March, the UK government was in Brussels arguing for a lifting of the EU-wide ban on the use of hormones to promote animal growth. MAFF acknowledged that hormones permit even greater intensification of animal rearing, and that residues may get into food. But, said MAFF, there was 'no scientific justification for the ban', and the meat industry 'needs' such drugs in order to compete. Blinkered science and a quick profit. That's the source of the food scares.

### News

Phthalates and PVC plastic	3
Soya baby milks	3
Beef watch: did MAFF know?	4
Where has all the gelatin gone?	4
Adverts: our complaints upheld	5
Bees Knees: the health claims scam	5
Aspartame reviewed	6-7
Saccharin goes over the limit	8

### Checkout

The slimming foods that don't make you slimmer	9-11
Loopy labels extra	12

### Viewpoint

A new food agency — or MAFF reformed?	13
---------------------------------------	----

### Nutrition features

Dental erosion: when brushing damages teeth	14-15
Salt: the link with osteoporosis	16
The companies fighting for salt	16

### Food and society

Low income reports	17
--------------------	----

### Marketplace

	18
--	----

### Books

	19
--	----

### Feedback

	19
--	----

### Backbites

	20
--	----

## Support The Food Commission's campaign for safer, healthier food

If you are not a regular subscriber to *The Food Magazine* why not take out your own subscription and help support The Food Commission's work? We are a national not-for-profit organisation campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food and are completely independent, taking no subsidy from the government, the food industry or advertising. *The Food Magazine* is published four times a year.

**Turn to page 18 for subscription details.**

### Advertising Policy

The Food Magazine does not accept commercial advertising. Loose inserts are accepted subject to approval — please contact Ian Tokelove at The Food Commission for details

# Phthalates in baby milk

## Soya baby milks under review

**'Baby milks in gender-bender chemical scare' said the media. But are phthalates a risk to health? Sue Dibb looks behind the headlines.**

Phthalates have been used as plastic softeners (plasticisers) in the manufacture of plastics, particularly PVC, since the 1930s but only in recent years has the ability of some phthalates to mimic the hormone oestrogen been identified.

Phthalates, together with a wide range of other chemicals including dioxins, PCBs, phenolics and many pesticides are now known to disrupt hormones affecting sexual development and fertility in animals, and have been linked to falling sperm counts and breast cancer in humans.

Phthalates can migrate from packaging into foodstuffs. Printing inks for plastic, board and foil-packed products frequently contain phthalates, as do some of the adhesives used in packaging (see

*Food Magazine no.30).*

In March MAFF released the results of its monitoring of phthalates in food, including infant formulae.\* Of 15 brands tested all were found to contain low levels of phthalates although there was an eight-fold variation in levels between brands. The highest total phthalate concentration found was 10.2 mg/kg and it was estimated that a newborn infant would receive on average 0.13 mg/kg body-weight per day of total phthalate, falling to 0.10 mg/kg/day at six months. Following these results MAFF announced it would be assessing levels of phthalates in breast milk.

MAFF and the Department of Health insisted that levels fell well below Tolerable Daily Intakes (TDIs) but several phthalates are known to be testicular toxicants, and exposure of male rats to one phthalate, BBP, reduced sperm production and testes size at levels of 0.1 mg/kg. It is conventional to set 'safe' maximum levels for humans at one-hundredth the level known to produce effects in laboratory animals, but levels in formula milk of BBP ranged up to 0.0087 mg/kg body-weight/day — a safety margin of only one twelfth.

In 1991 a European Directive

stated that formula milks 'shall not contain any substance in such quantity as to endanger the health of infants.' But it was not until February this year that an amendment was passed stating that 'necessary maximum levels will be established without delay...' This will not come into force until 1999!

Meanwhile MAFF has asked baby milk companies to identify the source of the contamination and to reduce levels. Phthalates accumulate in fat, and in MAFF tests were found in poultry, carcass meat, eggs and milk.

Meanwhile Greenpeace is calling for a ban on PVC\*\*. Virtually all the phthalates produced are used in PVC, and PVC is also a major source of the carcinogen dioxin.

\* Phthalates in Infant Formulae, MAFF *Food Surveillance Information Sheet, 83*, March 1996; Phthalates in Food, MAFF *Food Surveillance Information Sheet, 82*, March 1996.

\*\* Greenpeace International, *Taking back our stolen future - hormone disruption and PVC plastic*, April 1996. £2.50 from Greenpeace (tel: 0171 865 6100).

■ A briefing paper, *Phthalates in baby milks* is available from Baby Milk Action, 23 St Andrew's Street, Cambridge CB2 3AX. (tel: 01223 464420).

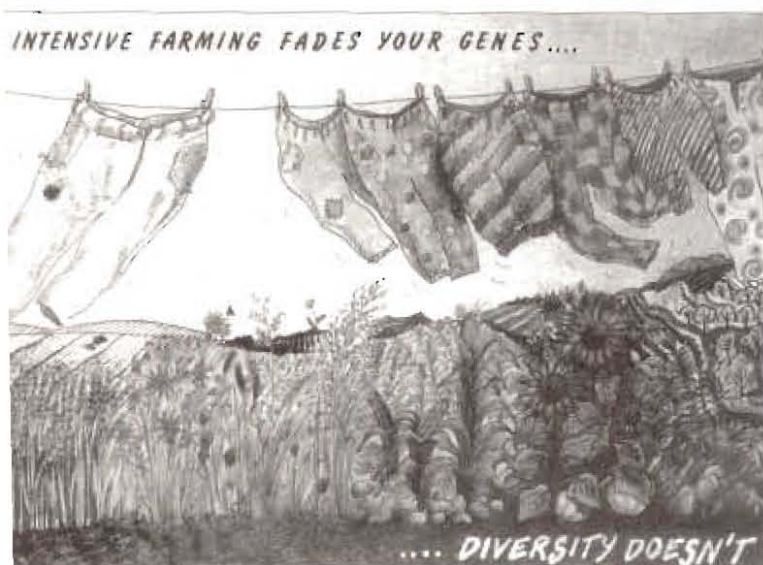
As we went to press a statement on phytoestrogens in soya baby milks was expected from the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) following a review by its scientific advisors. But tests on levels of phytoestrogens in soya baby milks and other foods for children, recommended by government scientific advisors four years ago, have still not started. MAFF told the Food Commission that they were unable to say when they will be completed.

Phytoestrogens are naturally occurring chemicals, found in high levels in soya products including baby milks, which can mimic the hormone oestrogen and potentially affect sperm production and other reproductive functions. Dr Richard Sharpe of the Medical Research Council's Reproductive Biology Unit who has studied the effects of oestrogen-mimics warns in the July issue of *BBC Good Food*: 'I try to avoid buying anything containing soya for my children. Some studies show that, in female animals, soya can produce the equivalent of a premature female menopause and can also have effects on male animals. Until I have a reassurance that it doesn't have comparable effects on humans, I would rather not give it to my children.' Professor Tom Sanders of Kings College, London also advises against feeding infants with soya products.

Babies fed exclusively on soya infant formula will consume 3-5 times more phytoestrogens (on a weight-for-weight basis) than has been found to disrupt the menstrual cycles of women. Nestlé, the world's leading manufacturer of baby milks, has acknowledged the 'potential oestrogenic activity of phytoestrogens' which is 'a major safety issue which has not been conclusively resolved' (see *Food Magazine* no 30).

**Fears that genetically engineered crops may pass their ability to resist pesticides to wild species are well-founded, according to Danish scientists.** Experiments on GE rapeseed have shown that their characteristics could spread by pollination to wild plants within two years.

■ *Riso National Research Laboratory, Denmark, fax 0045-4632-3383.*



**'Intensive farming uses fewer species... Biodiverse farming mixes species and varieties and maintains the variability of genetic material...' Postcard (by Leeds Postcards) available from Intermediate Technology (tel 01788 560631).**

**The UK government** has approved the use of genetically engineered maize in food products, but has joined other EU member states to ban the GE maize from being grown as a crop. The maize has been modified to resist the corn borer pest, and to survive spraying with the pesticide glufosinate ammonium (sold as Basta), and to resist a powerful antibiotic, ampicillin. There was no objection to human consumption of this cocktail, but the risk that the antibiotic resistance could spread to bacteria was considered unacceptable.

■ Report on GE Maize is available free from ACNFP Secretariat, MAFF Room 239c, Ergon House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR. See also Genetics Forum's *Splice*, June 1996 (tel 0171 638 0606).

## An offal warning

If MAFF officials were aware that the 1989 Specified Bovine Offals regulations, banning BSE-risk offal from human consumption, were being broken by slaughterhouses and food manufacturers, then those officials have a lot to answer for. Such was the view of one of the government-appointed advisors, Professor Jeff Almond, interviewed on *Panorama* in June 1996. The same programme showed an eleven-page letter from the Institution of Environmental Health Officers to MAFF, written in 1990, which detailed the evidence of local authority meat inspectors complaining that the regulations were being repeatedly ignored. That crucial letter was, according to the IEHO spokesperson on *Panorama*, never answered.

If the IEHO sent such a letter and never received an answer, then why, we might ask, did the IEHO not follow the matter up? Had MAFF received the letter? Who had read it? Who

was legally liable for reporting such failures and prosecuting?

Or were there other issues involved? In 1990 MAFF was engaged in a bitter war between the vets, the slaughterhouses and the meat inspectors (members of the IEHO), with MAFF wanting to set up a vet-run inspection service paid for by slaughterhouse levies, to replace the local-authority meat inspector services. In the end, the vet-run service has been introduced, but it is quite possible that in 1990 the meat inspectors, defending their jobs to the last, might have been unwilling to admit that they couldn't make the regulations stick.

Not that the new vet-run scheme has fared any better. Birmingham's local authority food inspectors found traces of banned spinal cord and thymus on several samples of meat in butchers shops in the city during April this year. All the meat had been passed by the vet-run Meat Hygiene Service.



## McTreason?

While McDonald's gets attacked by irate farmers for selling non-British beef in their UK burger bars, other companies have been doing just the same but more quietly. McVitie's, maker of the world-famous digestive biscuit, discreetly but reassuringly states in the ingredients list '...vegetable oil and hydrogenated vegetable oil and non UK sourced animal fat...'

**"Red sky at night, the cows are alright"**

## Carnivorous yeast

Now here's a little-known fact. The European beef ban initially focussed on gelatin, tallow, and bull's semen. Apart from journalists phoning the Food Commission to ask which foods contained bulls semen (none, of course — the only place it is put is up a cow) all seemed very straight forward.

But the minutes of the EU Scientific Committee on Food which discussed the ban on beef derivatives contained an interesting addition. A fourth derivative was also banned, unnoticed by the UK press. It was, and is, di-calcium phosphate, a bone-derivative used as yeast food. It helps bread rise more quickly. As a processing aid it may not get listed as a food ingredient in the final product.

So just when careful shoppers had learnt how to avoid beef by reading the ingredients list, they find they may have been eating BSE in their toast every morning instead.

## Jelly deals

What do you do with several months-worth of Europe-banned gelatin piling up in warehouses? It is perfectly legal to put it in UK-sold food, of course. Or should you throw it away?

We can't answer the question. And it must be a complete coincidence that several new versions of children's sweets are being promoted this summer: chewier Fruit Gums (containing gelatin, which regular Fruit Gums do not) and chewier Skittles (also gelatin-containing), along with bigger rolls of Love Hearts, 10% extra Jelly Babies, new bags of Rowntree's Wine Gums, Jelly Beans and Jelly Babies and the brand new 'limited edition' Polo Gummies - all containing gelatin!

## Beef is safe, no?

Sitting in the BBC2 *Newsnight* studios next to Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health (who was assuring viewers that beef was perfectly safe 'in the usual sense of that word') was Professor John Patterson, chair of SEAC, the government's scientific advisory group on BSE and beef safety. He finished the discussion, and probably his future career, by saying 'if you aren't sure what it is or where it has come from then you had better not buy it'. (June 20th 1996).



## ASA agrees MLC got it wrong

Two complaints made by the Food Commission against an advert by the Meat and Livestock Commission were upheld by the Advertising Standards Authority in a ruling made this July.

The advertisement, claiming to set the record straight on BSE and beef safety, had stated that there was no increase in CJD numbers, and that control and enforcement measures in abattoirs ensured that even the remotest risk was avoided.



Oddly, despite accepting that there was a division of opinion on the topic, and despite describing the MLC's 'facts' as claims which were variously 'misleading',

'over-simplistic' and 'exaggerated', the ASA accepted the format of the advertisement, which presented the MLC's position as a series of facts. This is in contrast to the British Code of Advertising which states that 'if there is significant division of informed opinion about any claims made in an advertisement they should not be portrayed as universally agreed.'

■ (ASA Monthly Report, 62, July 1996.)

## ITC agrees Gaio got it wrong

Nine months after the start of a TV advertising campaign by MD Foods, in which Gaio yoghurt-style food was promoted with the claim 'actually lowers your cholesterol level', the Independent Television Commission, the body responsible for TV adverts, finally upheld a complaint against this claim made by the Food Commission. We had argued that the results of a single study of 29 middle-aged Danish men was not sufficient to substantiate such a general claim. Saying its medical adviser was sure the claim was a reasonable one, the ITC had reconsidered the case after the Advertising Standards Authority had ruled in the Food Commission's favour last February. 'In the light of this,' said the ITC's report, 'the ITC concluded that whilst there were no grounds for doubting the potential cholesterol-lowering properties of the product, the claim should have been presented in a more qualified manner.'

■ (ITC Television Advertising Complaints Report, 28 May 1996.)

**Two-thirds of parents (65%)** want to see tougher restrictions on advertising of food and soft drinks to children, according to a MORI opinion poll conducted for the National Food Alliance. Nearly three-quarters did not believe that food advertising encourages their children to eat a healthy balanced diet.

■ Adwatch 7, June 1996, National Food Alliance (tel: 0171 628 2442).

Would a label like this spoof one break the law? Probably not — because the law is so poorly defined. We are urging the Food Advisory Committee to tighten up the regulations on health claims.

Enriched with vitamin A — essential for preventing blindness!

**New! Chocolate flavour**

# Bees Knees

*Natural bees' honeycomb with beneficial pollen*

Wholesome and nutritious.  
Full of the energy children need to grow up strong and healthy.

Honeycomb has been used for centuries to prevent skin problems and promote a lively and alert mind.\*

Swiss scientists have shown that pollen from the blossom visited by bees contains nutrients whose full effects are still being discovered. Each packet of Bees Knees contains the equivalent of three thousand flowers!

*As taken by world class goalkeeper David Beaman!*

- ✓ With extra antioxidants — the nutrients that help your body fight cancer and heart disease.
- ✓ Each pack contains a complete day's vitamin C in one portion!
- ✓ Dietary fibre — found naturally in pollen — can lower blood cholesterol, boost the immune system, lower the risk of cancer and prevent constipation.

Ingredients: honeycomb, sugar, flavouring, vitamin C, vitamin A.

\* The Compleat Beekeeper, London, 1781.

## Who said this...?

'...food advertisers generally take their responsibilities seriously, but the strength of the health claims being made for some functional foods have begun to raise complaints as well as eyebrows.

'Unlike Japan, we have not yet reached the stage where meatballs are apparently advertised as lowering blood pressure and chewing gum is promoted as helping to prevent cancer. (But)... some of those in the vanguard of UK functional food advertising have been unable to

support the strong health claims they have made.

'One advertiser broke the Codes recently by claiming that their fibre-enriched fruit juice could help lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease. The advertisement had over-simplified the physiological processes involved and had exaggerated the drink's likely health benefits.

'Another advertiser boasted that "controlled clinical tests" had shown their yoghurt could actively reduce

cholesterol when eaten regularly as part of a low fat diet. A powerful claim, but one for which the supporting evidence was woefully inadequate; just one six-week trial, conducted in Denmark on a small sample of middle-aged men, and which concluded "these findings cannot be extrapolated for other human subjects".

'... Care must be taken to avoid exploiting the public's lack of nutritional expertise, and the Authority' — yes, perhaps you have

guessed, this is the Advertising Standards Authority — 'expects all health claims to be backed with appropriate scientific evidence. The further food claims move into medicinal or physiological territory, the more rigorous the substantiation expected to support them.'



# Is NutraSweet t

**Despite detailed reassurance from the manufacturers that the artificial sweetener aspartame causes no health problems, the anxieties refuse to disappear. We take a look at the controversial chemical.**

**A**spartame (known as NutraSweet or E951) has been dogged by controversy for some 15 years, since the days when it was being assessed by the US Food and Drug Administration. Various contentions that it aggravates brain, eye and nerve problems have been made, and that its methanol content is toxic (see box) but these are vigorously denied by the manufacturers. The only accepted problem is phenylalanine — an amino acid found in aspartame and other foods — which cannot

be metabolised by the one in 20,000 people who suffer from the metabolic disorder PKU. Aspartame-containing products often carry a warning of its presence.

Following the FDA's decision to permit aspartame in 1981, the sweetener was approved by the UK's Food Additives and Contaminants Committee, the EU's Scientific Committee on Foods, and the FAO/WHO's

Despite this widespread approval, there were continuing reports associating aspartame with nervous system problems: migraines,<sup>1</sup> eye pain,<sup>2</sup> headaches,<sup>3</sup> a range of neural and psychological problems in depressed patients,<sup>4</sup> seizures and spike waves in epileptics.<sup>5</sup> The Food Commission has received a worrying letter from a parent whose child appears to be especially reactive to products containing aspartame (see left). And a book published in the USA by neurosurgeon Dr Russell Blaylock asserts that aspartame may be far more toxic to the nervous system than was previously thought.<sup>6</sup> He also criticises the data supplied by aspartame's manufacturer G D Searle & Co when applying for FDA approval, suggesting that there may have been methodological flaws which masked the true incidence of brain tumours in laboratory rats.<sup>7</sup>

Yet the manufacturers assure us that 'over 200 objective and well-controlled scientific studies conducted by research institutions of world repute demonstrate aspartame's safety.'<sup>8</sup> And the UK's Professor Tom Sanders, of Kings College London, declares 'its safety is well established despite a succession of well-orchestrated scares.'<sup>9</sup>

Criticisms of the sweetener are resisted by the manufacturer, who took action against the *Guardian* newspaper in 1990 for implying their product might be unsafe and that the data the company had supplied to the FDA had been falsified. The *Guardian* apologised.

While the controversy continues, consumption climbs. The UK authorities permitted an estimated 1,800,000 pounds of aspartame to be added to our food supply last year.<sup>10</sup>

**Dear Food Commission**

I discovered through trial and error that my three and a half year old son is sensitive to aspartame, nearly two years ago. Whenever he ingested anything containing aspartame, his behaviour changed dramatically within one or two hours, and the effects would last up to 48 hours.

Typically, he would run about in circles, pushing out at anything in his way, he would not respond to any requests. Since he has got older, he has said that his 'brain is itchy' when he is so affected. ... I feel sure he cannot be the only child adversely affected by artificial sweeteners.

**Dr D J Griggs**

Joint Expert Committee  
on Food Additives

## Aspartame and methanol?

Twelve years ago nutritionist Woodrow Monte, director of the Food Science and Nutrition Laboratory at Arizona State University,<sup>11</sup> appealed to the FDA not to approve aspartame because of its untested methanol content. The aspartame molecule, he said, consists of three components: phenylalanine, aspartic acid and methanol (wood alcohol). For every molecule of aspartame metabolised, a molecule of methanol is released into the bloodstream.

Methanol is a highly toxic alcohol (far more

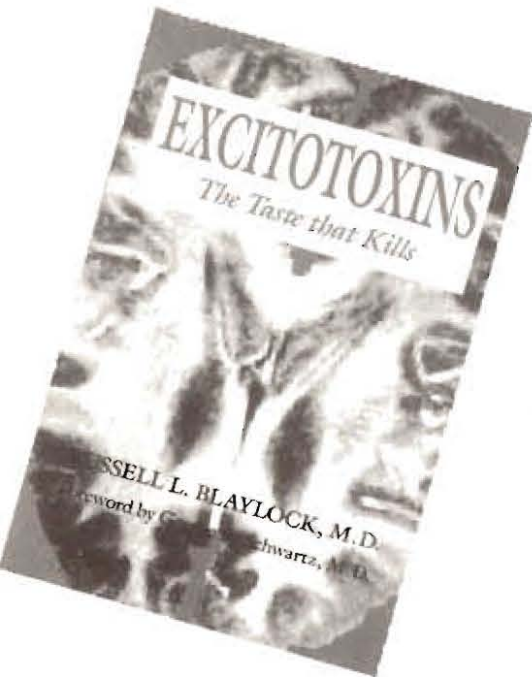
than the ethanol form which many people enjoy) and methanol poisoning leads to symptoms of headaches, dizziness, nausea, memory lapses, and visual disturbances. Consumption of six grams of methanol, barely a teaspoonful, has caused death although other people have survived doses ninety times this level.

Methanol is present in fruit and fruit juices and especially in alcoholic beverages. But in these foods the methanol is accompanied by larger amounts of ethanol, and, according to Professor

Monte, the presence of ethanol slows down the metabolism of the methanol, allowing much of the latter to be excreted in the breath and urine. In aspartame-sweetened beverages there is no accompanying ethanol.

According to Professor Monte, safety levels for methanol (especially if consumed in the absence of ethanol) have not been established for humans. Safety limits are usually set at one hundredth the 'highest no-observed-effect' level, but no such level has been established for methanol. With six grams of methanol capable of causing death, a 'no-observed-effect' level would be far below this. Six grams of methanol is found in about 100 litres of aspartame-sweetened beverages, which means a single litre is likely to be far above an acceptable safety level for methanol, if such a level were ever set.

# Turning sour?



A controversial book from a US neurosurgeon claims aspartame and monosodium glutamate are toxic to brain tissue.

## Where to find aspartame

The artificial sweetener aspartame is popular among food manufacturers, who find the lack of bitterness and sugar-like mouth feel useful and economical for making popular foods. As the table shows, it is not only found in reduced-sugar products but in many other products, too.

### Sugar-reduced drinks, eg:

Coca-Cola Diet  
Pepsi Diet  
Pepsi Max  
Lucozade Diet Sport  
Ribena 'No Added Sugar'  
Ribena Light 'Lower Sugar'  
Robinsons no added sugar fruit concentrates  
Rowntrees no added sugar High Juice Fruit Drink  
Sainsburys no added sugar fruit concentrates  
Tesco no added sugar fruit drinks

### Regular drinks, eg:

C Vit concentrate  
Kia Ora Whole Orange concentrate  
Lucozade Sport  
Ribena Juice & Fibre  
Ribena Orange and Apricot juice drink  
Robinsons fruit concentrates  
Robinsons Whole Orange drink  
Rowntrees High Fruit Juice Drink  
Safeways Whole Orange drink  
Safeway Saver sparkling lemonade  
Sainsburys cool crush fruit drink  
Schweppes blackcurrant cordial  
Tango Orange (black bottled)  
Tesco Whole Orange drink  
Tesco fruit juice drinks

### Tabletop sweeteners, eg:

Canderel  
Sweetex

### Desserts, eg:

Birds Angel Delight no added sugar  
Birds Dream Topping sugar-free  
Birds sugar-free jelly  
Munch Bunch Freeze Pop ice lollies  
Rowntrees sugar-free jelly

### Yoghurts, eg:

Muller light yoghurt  
Safeways virtually fat free yoghurt  
Sainsburys diet fromage frais  
Sainsburys low fat fool  
Sainsburys yoghurt light  
Spar low fat yoghurt  
St Ivel Shape yoghurts  
St Ivel Shape Twinpots

### Snacks, eg:

Golden Wonder Nik Naks  
(spare rib flavour)  
Red Mill Power Pack  
(bacon and tomato flavour)  
Walkers Monster Munch  
(spaghetti sauce flavour)

### Chewing gum, eg:

Dentyne  
Wrigleys Extra sugar-free  
Wrigleys Orbit sugar-free  
Haitai, regular and sugar-free  
Clorets, breath fresheners

- Johns, D.R. (1986) Migraine provoked by aspartame, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 315, 456.
- Roberts, H.J. (1988) in Wurtman and Walker (eds) *Dietary Phenylalanine and Brain Function*, Boston: Birkhauser.
- Lipton, R.E. et al (1988) Aspartame and headache, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 318, 1200; Steinmetzer, R.V. and Kunkle, R.S. (1988) Aspartame and headaches, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 318, 1201.
- Walton, R.G. et al (1993) Adverse reactions to aspartame: Double-blind challenge in patients from a vulnerable population, *Biological Psychiatry*, 34, 13-17.
- Wurtman, R.J. (1985) Aspartame: possible effects on seizure susceptibility, *Lancet*, 2 (8463), 1060; Camfield, P.R. et al (1992) Aspartame exacerbates EEG spike wave discharge in children with generalised absence epilepsy, *Neurology*, 42, 1000-1003.
- Blaylock, R.L. (1994) *Excitotoxins: The Taste that Kills*, Santa Fe: Health Press.
- Similar concerns about the adequacy of the pre-approval trials of aspartame are expressed in Millstone, E. and Abraham, J. (1988) *Additives: A Guide for Everyone*, UK: Penguin Books.
- Correspondence from NutraSweet Information Centre to the Food Commission, 29th May 1996.
- Sanders, T. and Bazalgette, P. (1991) *The Food Revolution*, London: Bantam/Transworld.
- Zenith International for the BBC2 *Money Programme* — cited in the *Food Magazine*, 32, January-April 1996.
- Monte, W.C. (1984) Aspartame: methanol and the public health, *Journal of Applied Nutrition*, 35, 42-54.

# Saccharin levels exceed the limit

Surrey County Council Trading Standards Officers report an excess of saccharin in a range of popular products (see page 11). They also found many of the drinks to contain a cocktail of artificial sweeteners, and many to contain artificial sweeteners in combination with sugar.

The report from the Assistant County Scientific Officer was dated 14 August 1995 but has only just been released by Surrey Trading Standards. In it, the tables list 316 popular makes of squashes, concentrates, ready-to-drink fruit drinks, and carbonated drinks, showing 25 brands which exceed the legal saccharin limit of 80mg/litre (see table).

Saccharin has been linked to bladder cancer in laboratory animals. It is banned in Canada and until recently has been restricted in several EU states. In the USA saccharin-containing products must carry a warning:

THE USE OF THIS PRODUCT MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH. THIS PRODUCT CONTAINS SACCHARIN WHICH HAS BEEN DETERMINED TO CAUSE CANCER IN LABORATORY ANIMALS.

No such warning is required in the UK. A 1993 government survey found a startling one in twelve young children (8%) aged under 2.5 years were exceeding the Acceptable Daily Intake levels for saccharin, despite the fact that food sold for babies and young children is not allowed to contain any type of artificial sweetener.

■ More details from Lynis Morris, Surrey Trading Standards, tel 01306 513020.

## Excessive saccharin found in popular drinks

Products	saccharin level when diluted ready to drink (mg/litre)	Also contains:
Right Price sparkling lemonade	148	As
Nisa diet low-calorie lemonade	87	As
Right Price no added sugar orange drink	114	As
Panda Pops rhubarb & custard drink	86	Sug
Tip Top raspberry drink	83	As, AcK
Citrus Grove blackcurrant drink	96	As, AcK, Sug
Tesco value low calorie orange drink	114	Sug
Tesco apple and blackcurrant drink	86	As, Sug
Tesco mixed fruit drink	83	As, Sug
Tesco whole grapefruit drink	84	As, Sug
Tesco healthy eating sugar-free orange drink	101	As, Sug
Tesco whole orange drink	85	As, Sug
Tesco orange, lemon and pineapple drink	83	As, Sug
Tesco whole lemon drink	88	As, Sug
Safeway diet sparkling lemonade	126	As
Tricherrytops Cherryade	100	As, AcK
Farm Stores whole orange drink	81	As, Sug
Farm Stores lemonade	165	As
Stegomax limeade	93	As, AcK
Megasaurus Max lemonade	99	As, AcK
Mega Max Cola	88	As, AcK
Spar sparkling cherryade	82	Sug
Safeway Savers sugar-free whole orange drink	115	Sug
Co-op traditional diet lemonade	109	As
Co-op low calorie orange drink	150	

The statutory limit is 80mg/litre.

As=Aspartame, AcK=Acesulfame potassium, Sug=Sugar (>0.5%)

Source: Surrey Trading Standards *Soft Drink Survey, Artificial Sweeteners — Diluted Samples*. The Food Commission would like readers to note that manufacturers may change their formulations.

**Baby milk companies** suffered a setback when their attempts to stop or amend the latest World Health Organisation resolution on baby food failed. The resolution expressed concern that health workers are 'subject to subtle pressure to accept inappropriate financial or other support for training', and urged member states to ensure there were no such conflicts of interest. It also called for the monitoring of baby milk companies to be 'transparent, independent and free from commercial influence' and that 'complementary foods are not marketed for or used in ways that undermine exclusive and sustained breastfeeding.'

■ Details from Baby Milk Action (tel 01223 464420).

**The National Food Alliance** has welcomed the long awaited government-funded review of the role of TV advertising in children's food choice but has criticised the researchers for failing to draw clear conclusions beyond the need for further research. The report does not rule out the possibility that advertising may be particularly influential at certain stages of childhood, and it confirms that young children do not understand the objectives of advertising, raising questions over direct advertising to children too young to distinguish or understand advertising's purpose.

■ *The Role of Television Advertising in Children's Food Choice*; MAFF (tel: 0171 238 6244)

**The National Consumer Council** says company-sponsored educational resources are biased, plastered with company logos or actively encourage children to eat chocolate and fast food. A Cadbury resource pack for 11-12 year-olds stated as a 'chocolate fact' that: 'Chocolate is a wholesome food that tastes really good. It is fun to eat at any time of the day and gives you energy and important nutrients that your body needs to work properly.' A booklet from Mars for primary pupils mentions the company seven times, Mars Bars thirteen times and other Mars products fifteen times.

■ *Sponsorship in Schools: A checklist for teachers, governors, school boards and parents*; National Consumer Council (tel: 0171 730 3469)

**Helping children to choose** their food wisely is the aim of a new teaching resource for 7-11 year-olds from the National Heart Forum. *Eat Your Words* focuses on the advertising, packaging and labelling of food encouraging children to think critically about food messages and become discerning food consumers. The Forum is also launching a nation-wide school competition based on *Eat Your Words*.

■ National Heart Forum (tel: 0171 383 7838; fax: 0171 387 2799)





# CHECKOUT

## Slim chances!

Despite a government target to cut Britain's obesity figures by a quarter, the latest figures show a further increase in the average waistline. But what are the food companies doing to help us lose weight? We look at the chaos and confusion surrounding the labelling and promotion of products sold to flab-fearing shoppers.

For over twenty years the Department of Health has been worried about our weight. In their mild-mannered leaflet of 1978 they advised 'Obesity can mean ill-health or premature death... A practical way... (to avoid obesity) is not to become overweight' and went on to discourage eating fatty foods and to limit our sugar consumption. Then, with expert advisory groups such as NACNE, JACNE and a series of COMA reports, plus the setting of targets in the *Health of the Nation* white paper (see box), the government has continued to urge heavier consumers to watch their weight.

The emphasis on individual responsibility has left the field clear for food companies to continue their promotion of fat-inducing foods (see past issues of the *Food Magazine* for reports on food advertising) while also devising food products which they could sell to those worried that they may be over-eating. Far from being a successful strategy, the UK has seen increasing numbers of overweight people (see box) and concern about the burden on the NHS of obesity-related diseases, such as arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Attempts to encourage the food industry to share the task of promoting healthier eating have been limited. The moves in the Nutrition Task Force towards encouraging healthier catering practices and getting manufacturers to undertake a 'fat audit' of their products have shown what is possible, but processed food companies know they have little to gain from encouraging the main recommendations for health — generous helpings of fresh fruits and vegetables and basic staple foods, and a limit to the amount of processed foods. Indeed, when the Department of Health made one of the strongest statements on what is needed for better dietary health

they were ridiculed by the food industry for recommending what size of potato we should eat.

So what do food companies themselves have to offer? We looked at meal replacements in 1992 (see the *Food Magazine*, 16) and found many to be little better than a chocolate biscuit or a milk shake. A new European Directive will put limits on the claims made for complete slimming diets and meal replacements, but the Directive will not deal with

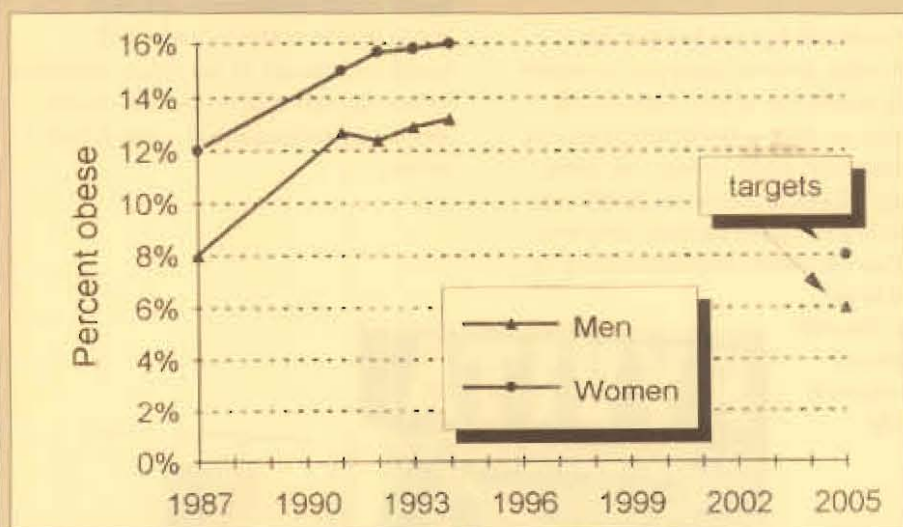
other foods and the claims they make.

In this issue we look at the labelling chaos among the promoters of supposedly healthier products: products which should be encouraging healthy patterns of eating but which, we fear, may only encourage a taste for processed food, and do little to reduce the consumption of calories.

■ Research: Sabine Durand-Gasslein

### Obesity: Missing the target

The 1992 *Health of the Nation* targets aimed to reduce obesity\* rates down to no more than 6 per cent of men and 8 per cent of women by the year 2005. The trend is in the other direction.



\* a Body Mass Index of over 30(kg/m<sup>3</sup>), for people aged 16-64.

Sources: *Health Survey for England 1994*, HMSO, 1996.

# CHECKOUT

# Slimming food

**You can't get slim by eating more food. Yet manufacturers make their money by selling more and more products, so what can they sell to slimmers? Answer: the illusion that by eating their product you will lose rather than gain. We think the only pounds you will lose are from your purse!**

Nimble 'light' white bread claims 'Only 49 Calories per slice'. But Safeways Premium white sliced is only 54 Calories for a heavier slice.

Nimble contains 235 Calories per 100g weight, more than Safeway white bread at 233 Calories per 100g and exactly the same as Hovis (made by the same company). So is Nimble a slimming food? The pack says it 'allows you to enjoy a healthy, calorie controlled diet' — which is not the proper form of the statutory slimming food disclaimer. In fact, Nimble told us, the word 'light' refers to the texture, not the calories.



Regular crispbreads have long been seen as a slimmers friend, and Ryvita happily puts the statutory slimming disclaimer on the pack. Boots also sells crispbreads, specially designed for their Shapers line. Their crispbread is, weight for weight, very similar, being only 10% lower in calories. The big difference comes in the price: Ryvita's large pack works out at under £2 per kilo (and own branded crispbreads can be found for just £1.20 per kilo) while Boots' tiny pack (25g) works out at £9.20 a kilo!



Waistline, boasting 70% less fat, is surely a product aimed at those wanting to slim. We think so, but Nestlé, owners of Crosse & Blackwell, don't put the statutory disclaimer on this product.

They told us they had re-positioned their Waistline salad dressing range 'as reduced fat and low fat products, more to emphasise healthier eating rather than calorie reduction or weight loss'. Which we assume means that Waistline does *not* claim to be a slimming product, despite the name.



McVitie's 'Light' digestive boasts 25% less fat. This must be good for weight loss, surely? Well — possibly not. Although the biscuits have stayed much the same size and weight, the calories per biscuit have only dropped from 73 to 69 — a cut of barely 5 per cent.

Findus have responded to criticisms of small Lean Cuisine servings by offering bigger ones: you now get 307 Calories in a 350g dish, for £2.29.



But get out your calculator, because we also have Weight Watchers offering 240 Calories in a 300g dish, for £1.99, and Birds Eye's Healthy Options 'complete balanced meal' (which has no slimming disclaimer) offering 410 Calories in a 365g serving, costing £2.75.

Meanwhile regular versions of these dishes such as Safeway's, are offering you 352 Calories in a 275g serving, for 99p. None of these will make you thin — go for taste or for price instead.

Incidentally, Birds Eye do not want anyone to get the impression that Healthy Options are slimming meals. Oh no. They said 'We have invested heavily in communicating the benefits of the range and to differentiate between Healthy Options and 'diet' ready meals, with advertising, information leaflets and dedicated consumer carelines...'



The labels on Heinz Weight Watchers baked beans had us muddled. Their single serving of Weight Watchers provides 115 Calories, while their regular single-serving provides 113 Calories! The serving size is the confusion here: the Weight Watchers single-portion tin is 205g, while the regular tin is 150g. If you are happy with the smaller, regular size then you save 4p as well as the 2 Calories.

Heinz told us they actually sell two different 'single serving' regular beans, and the larger is the same as the Weight Watchers size. 'The size of a single serving,' they told us, 'is determined by the volume of the can.' So there!

# CHECKOUT

## — or just the image?



The brand name 'Shape' and the emphasis on low fat levels surely imply slimming products? And they replaced the sugar with artificial sweetener, too. So surely these count as slimming foods? But the manufacturers, St Ivel, have not put a statutory disclaimer on their products, so presumably they believe these are *not* slimming foods.

When we asked St Ivel, they told us that Shape products 'can help slimming or weight control as part of a calorie controlled diet and healthy lifestyle'.

So they are slimming products? They continued: 'However, they are delicious, light, fresh foods in their own right, and are not just eaten by people on a diet. Hence we do not find it necessary to put additional claims on the pack about slimming or weight control.' So they are *not* slimming products...



So what makes Special K special? It's advertising might imply it helps with weight control, but it doesn't carry a slimming claim or the statutory disclaimer.

Nor can it be called a reduced-calorie food: indeed, weight for weight, it offers the same calories as Rice Krispies, plus more salt, more fat and 50% more sugar!

It must be the special price – over £5 per kilo.

### Energy measures

The common units of energy used in dietary calculations are Calories (with a capital C, equal to a thousand calories with a little c), more formally known as kilocalories or kcal. The term is increasingly being replaced by joules, or kilojoules (kJ). One kilocalorie equals 4.184 kilojoules.

Adults typically need 1800–2500 kcal per day. To lose a pound of fat you need to consume about 3,500 fewer calories than you burn, preferably



You get just 59 Calories in a Slim-a-Soup Minestrone pack, and 95 Calories in the regular Cup-a-Soup version. The secret of Batchelor's special formulation? Just cut the quantity — from 25g to 15g per pack. Weight for weight the Slim-a-Soup actually has more fat, and the calorie levels are virtually the same: (363 for regular compared with 351 kcal/100g for Slim-a-Soup).

Meanwhile Heinz Weight Watcher soup offers less than 60 Calories for a 13.5 g serving, and Boots have got their Shapers soup down to just 40 Calories per serving. Mind you, you get a measly 10.5 grams of product. On an equal weight basis, Boots Shapers scores worst, at 373 kcal/100g.

If you like the taste and want to save money too, then at just 65 Calories per serving you could have a regular Knorr instant soup.



Well done for Pot Noodle's efforts: they've cut the calories by 50%, and cut the fat and the sugar, too! How do they do that? Mostly by cutting the weight of the pack — down by nearly 40%! (On an equal weight basis the calories are only down 19%.) For the light-weight pack you pay 4p more, making Pot Light's price nearly £14 per kilo (compared with Pot Noodles' price under £8 per kilo).

### Low-calorie and slimming claims on food labels.

Under the Food Regulations (1984, 1995) a product which claims it is 'an aid to slimming or weight control or weight reduction or has a reduced energy or low energy value' must, amongst other things,

- put a disclaimer on the label saying the product 'can help slimming or weight control only as part of a calorie (or joule, or energy) controlled diet'.
- ensure, if claiming the product has 'reduced' energy, that it has no more than three-quarters the energy value of a similar food for which no claim is made.
- ensure, if claiming the product has 'low' energy, that it has no more than 40 kcal per 100g and per serving; and a low-calorie soft drink has no more than 53 kcal per litre at normal dilution.

Apart from this there are few limits to what a manufacturer can pass off as 'helping' to make you thin, except for one interesting requirement: 'The food must be capable of contributing to weight control or weight reduction.' Fat chance!

# CHECKOUT

## Loopy Labels Extra

Here are two more curious labels, and a booklet to beat bad labelling.

### Double-take

The ingredients list includes vitamin A, which olestra has to include under the licensing terms granted by the US Food and Drug Administration. Yet the nutrition panel declares that the product provides zero per cent of the Recommended Daily Amount of vitamin A. Eh?!

This anomaly reflects olestra's ability to carry its vitamin A straight through you, leaving none to contribute to the RDA. If it wasn't added, the olestra would soak up vitamin A from the food you are eating with it — creating a negative contribution to the RDA!

Meanwhile the launch of Procter & Gamble's fat-free fat substitute, olestra, as an ingredient in potato crisps, tortilla chips

and the like in three mid-western cities in the USA is being watched with interest.

And no-one is more interested than the Washington-based Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a consumer-advocacy group which is concerned that olestra, marketed as Olean and sold by snack food giant Frito-Lay, can lead to nutritional problems and digestive complaints (see *Food Magazine* no.33). CSPI has taken local television station advertisements warning consumers they may experience problems, and offering a freephone number to report any complaints. They have, they tell us, already received a flood of responses.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 oz. (28g/About 17 chips)	
Servings Per Container About 6	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 75	Calories from Fat 0
% Daily Values*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 190mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 17g	8%
Dietary Fiber 1g	6%
Sugars 0g	4%
Protein 2g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 10%
Calcium 0%	Iron 2%

\* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	Less than	300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:  
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

**Ingredients:** Potatoes, Olestra (OLEAN® brand), Salt, alpha-Tocopheryl Acetate (Vitamin E), Vitamin A Palmitate, Tocopherols (to protect flavor), Vitamin K, and Vitamin D.

### Message on a bottle

An unusual bottle. It has no list of ingredients. No manufacturer's name or address. No statement of weight or volume. No 'best before' date.

It's a free sample, posted through the doors of houses in Epsom, Surrey. Does it break the law? This is unclear: the labelling regulations cover all food 'to be delivered as such to the ultimate consumer' but the same regulations only make it an offence to sell a wrongly-labelled product. Labels may break the law, it seems, but no offence is being committed!

Incidentally, an accompanying leaflet gave a few more details, but no list of ingredients. It did say that the drink should be extra diluted 'if given to toddlers', but didn't mention the presence of the artificial sweetener, saccharin, which is banned from foods for babies and young children.

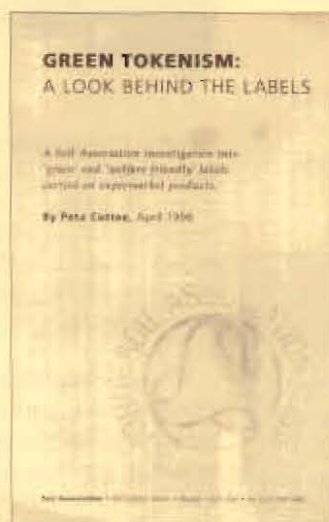


### Behind the label

A look behind the so-called animal welfare-friendly labelling schemes has been published by the Soil Association.

A year ago the Food Commission and the Soil Association published their review of the good, the bad and the down-right misleading meat and animal product labels (see the *Food Magazine* 29). Now this exposé of the retailers who pass-off intensively-reared livestock as welfare-friendly has been expanded to include fruit and vegetable labels, and has been published by the Soil Association as an 18-page document for £3.00 (inc 50p p&p).

■ Green Tokenism by Peta Cottee, from the Soil Association, 86 Colston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB (tel 0117 929 0661).



# A Food Standards Agency – or MAFF reformed?

**Calls to remove food safety from the clutches of MAFF are not new. But, what would that gain? And could we get what we want – asks a group of four Food Magazine advisers – within a re-structured MAFF?**

From the moment Stephen Dorrell announced the possibility of a link between BSE and a new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, British food policy and the role of the state in relation to our food has been scrutinised to a degree not seen since World War II.

The spotlight on MAFF was not so much because it failed to act in 1985 when the disease was first seen; but more that the balancing act a government performs between different interests — health, trade, farming, the consumer — appeared to have been tilted strongly in favour of farming and British exports. Ironically, this policy has damaged all sectors, including those it was most trying to protect.

The handling of BSE highlights a fundamental flaw in MAFF's construction since the War. Designed initially to ensure food security by intensifying food production, it has been unable to deal with the consequences, and especially with three issues: the environmental impact of industrialised agriculture, the effect of intensively-produced and processed food on public health, and the cost and impact of joining the European Community in 1973, with its Common Agricultural Policy and unified market.

The premise on which MAFF was founded was that producer and consumer interests coincide in the production of cheap and available food. For at least ten years it has been clear that the premise is false. Since 1984 an apparently endless series of controversies over the safety and quality of food has shown how the interests of consumers have not been coinciding with those of farmers or the food industry, and that MAFF, as presently structured, could not reconcile the conflicting interests.

## Options for change

There are several ways to separate consumer and producer interests. Food quality concerns could be transferred to the Department of Health. Or food and agriculture industry concerns could be transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry. Environmental issues could be transferred to the Department of the Environment. Even as we write, these options are being considered by cabinet members. Alternatively, as the Labour Party and the Consumers Association have proposed, we could have a separate statutory agency regulating food standards. Or, of course, the present ministry could be radically reformed.

The problem with removing food standards and safety concerns from MAFF is that such a move could leave the remaining ministry a much stronger advocate of industrialised, intensive food production. There would be no call for consumer representation. MAFF would regulate the process of food production, and wash its hands of the product.

Furthermore, creating a separate Food Standards Agency begs the question of accountability. The USA Food and Drug Administration, itself not free of controversy, is an arm of the executive and must answer to Congress. In the UK, many independent quasi-governmental agencies are largely insulated from Parliamentary scrutiny. If a UK food agency was just mechanical, implementing decisions made elsewhere, then creating a 'quango' might be justified if rather pointless. It wouldn't solve the problems. The food crises of the last decade have shown that the underlying problems are social and political ones, and must be dealt with in the social and political realm.

Food policy is a political responsibility, answerable to the body politic — ministers, parliament and the public. Food safety needs more public involvement, not more statutory agencies. Indeed, it can be argued that there are advantages for retaining responsibility for the entire food chain 'from the plough to the plate' within one department — but a reformed one.

## Policy priorities

That said, whatever institutional structure is established should be built on certain principles. It must be properly funded. It must be transparent in its operations. And it should elevate consumer needs — including environmental, employment and health concerns — to ensure they cannot be submerged by commercial needs.

Monitoring the quality of food is split between government programmes, mostly through MAFF, and programmes run by local authority trading standards, public analyst and environmental health departments. Funding is woefully inadequate in these programmes, with food sampling and analysis rates far below the European average.

Transparency is needed to ensure that advice given to ministers is also available for the public to assess. Government advisers with commercial interests should be seen to have such interests, and their contributions assessed in that light. Food surveillance and research programmes should put their results in the public domain, backed up by a consumer-friendly information unit and open library.

Putting consumers' needs further up the agenda means publishing a set of inter-departmental food policy goals and a set of proposals to achieve them. There should be regular food attitude surveys and funding for open debates on food policy. There should be better information to consumers — such as better labelling, more responsible advertising and more food topics in schools. And there should be a programme of reform of farm subsidies and retail planning priorities to ensure that cheaper, healthy food is available to all members of the population.

■ This article is based on *Modernising UK food policy: The case for reforming the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*, by Tim Lang, Erik Millstone, Hugh Raven and Mike Rayner, published by the Centre for Food Policy, Thames Valley University, Wolfson School of Health Sciences, 32-38 Uxbridge Road, Ealing, London W5 2BS, July 1996, £5.50 (inc 50p p&p).



## Don't brush your teeth after drinking soft drinks!

**Brushing your teeth after drinking a sugary, acidic soft drink can make things worse, warns the British Dental Association. Alice Furniss reports.**

**T**he two common dental diseases of caries and gum disease have been joined by a third — dental erosion — as dentists see rising numbers of people, especially children, showing a pattern of generalised loss of the surface of the tooth.

Erosion can be caused by mechanical wear on the surface, such as that caused by grinding teeth while sleeping. But the likely cause of erosion being found in children is not mechanical but chemical: a leaching away of the tooth's surface by acids present in food and drinks. Soft drinks

in particular have been linked to dental erosion, as they coat the surface of the tooth with an acidic fluid. And, although sugar is converted by mouth bacteria into acidic compounds on the tooth, low calorie 'diet' drinks have also been linked to tooth erosion<sup>1</sup>. Fruit juices appear to be less eroding than soft drinks (see box and table).

Dental erosion starts with a gradual loss of the surface enamel, followed by more serious damage to the dentine underneath, and eventually the inner dental pulp. As the enamel dissolves the teeth will become more sensitive to

cold and hot foods. The teeth may become brittle and may chip or fracture at the edges. Dental procedures to repair the damage include coating the tooth with additional protective materials, devitalising the tooth to prevent painful sensitivity, rebuilding the tooth and fixing orthodontic appliances to

maintain tooth position.

Prevention of tooth erosion by encouraging children not to drink sugary and acidic beverages can be difficult, particularly when children are subject to commercial and peer pressures to continue consuming such products. If children do drink soft drinks then dentists advise using a

### Acidity levels of soft drinks and juices

The lower the pH value, the more acidic the drink. Anything under pH 5.5 can potentially cause erosion.

	pH
Leading cola brands (sugar-sweetened)	2.4-2.8
Other cola brands (sugar with sweeteners)	2.4-2.8
Diet colas (sweeteners only)	2.6-3.0
Soft drinks and diluted squashes	2.6-3.0
Low calorie soft drinks	3.0-3.2
Grapefruit juice	3.1-3.4
Orange juice	3.3-3.5
Pineapple juice	3.3-3.7
Apple juice	3.4-3.7

Source: British Soft Drinks Association

### The damage starts early

Over a quarter (27%) of children aged 15 were showing dental erosion to the permanent teeth, according to the 1993 Child Dental Health Survey. And an incredible 50% of six-year olds showed erosion to their primary teeth.

In the same year, the National Diet and Nutrition Survey found that by the age of five 13% of children could expect to have had the enamel surface eroded through to the underlying dentine in one or more teeth. The survey found this degree of erosion was linked to the degree of consumption of various foods and soft drinks. As the table shows, 20% of children who regularly consumed a lot of soft drinks showed erosion into their dentine, and 24% of children showed erosion if they consumed large quantities of sweet food generally.

### Percentage of children aged 3½ - 4½ showing erosion into dentine, according to their regular consumption of various products.

	low consumption*	high consumption*
Soft drinks	4%	20%
Fruit juices	15%	10%
Sugar confectionery	13%	18%
Chocolate confectionery	14%	10%
All above, plus cakes, biscuits, jams, ice creams, sweet puddings	6%	24%

\* 'low consumption' means the ten percent of children who ate/drank the least amount of the food or drink, and 'high consumption' means the ten percent who ate/drank the most.

Source: National Diet and Nutrition Survey, Vol 2, HMSO 1995.

wide-bore straw, which reduces the amount of drink which flushes around the mouth.

The damage starts within 45 seconds of consuming an acid drink, and can continue for an hour. Brushing the teeth during this period can increase the damage done, so the British Dental Association recommends *not* brushing the teeth straight after drinking acidic drinks. There is, though, good evidence that brushing the teeth with a fluoride toothpaste shortly *before* exposure to acid can help reduce the damage<sup>1</sup>.

1 Bishop, K, Briggs, P. and Kelleher, M. The aetiology and management of localised anterior tooth wear in the young adult, *Dental Update*, May 1994, 153-160.

2 Davis, W.B. and Winter, P.J. The effect of abrasion on enamel and dentine after exposure to dietary acid, *British Dental Journal*, 148, 1980, 253-256.



Two thirds of soft drinks are consumed by adolescents and younger children. The picture shows three acidic soft drinks of the sort linked to tooth erosion. The packs shown have some 50-60 grams of sugar in each one, equivalent to about twenty sugar cubes.

**Low vitamin E consumption** raises the risk of death from coronary heart disease. The intake of vitamins A, E and C from food and supplements of 34,486 post-menopausal women with no cardiovascular disease was assessed by questionnaire. After 7 years follow-up there was no link to vitamin A or vitamin C intake, and only a weak one to vitamin E from supplements. However, women in the highest 20% of vitamin E intake from food sources had less than half the risk of death from coronary heart disease of women in the lowest 20%. ■ Kushi et al, 1996, *N Eng J Med*, 334, 1156-1162

**A 12-year trial of beta carotene** supplements involving 22,071 American male physicians aged 40-84 found there was no significant

difference in the overall incidence of cancer or cardiovascular disease, or in overall mortality, between the group taking the beta carotene supplement and the group taking the placebo.

■ Hennekens et al, 1996, *N Eng J Med*, 334, 1145-9

**The diets of fifty vegetarian children** aged 7-11, compared with matched omnivores, were significantly lower in energy, higher in fibre and showed a higher polyunsaturated:saturated fat ratio. There were no significant differences in iron or overall fat intakes. The children's blood cholesterol levels were not significantly different. The haemoglobin level of the vegetarian children was significantly below that of the omnivores. Overall, the vegetarians' diet more closely

resembled current government recommendations than the omnivores, although they might benefit from advice to ensure optimal iron absorption.

■ Nathan et al, 1996, *Brit J Nutr*, 75, 533-544.

**Non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL)** in older women was found to be more common among those eating the most animal protein, red meat (especially hamburger), saturated fat and monounsaturated fat. No association was found with milk or dairy products nor with vegetables, although there was a trend toward decreased risk of NHL with greater consumption of fruits.

■ Chui et al, 1996, *JAMA*, 275 (17).

**In 1982, Greeks living in Australia** were the second longest lived population in the world. In 1989 the figures had deteriorated. A comparison of elderly Greeks in Melbourne with that of elderly Greeks in Spata (chosen as a surrogate measure of diets prevalent in the 1950-60s when mass migration to Australia took place) found the former to be eating more animal foods, legumes, protein, margarine, polyunsaturated fats, beer and eating less cereal, carbohydrate, wine and olive oil. The Melbourne Greeks also showed higher storage-iron levels, impaired immunity and greater prevalence of obesity and abdominal fatness.

■ Kounis-Blazos et al, 1996, *Age and Ageing*, 25, 177-189.

# Salt suspects

**The battle lines on salt are becoming clearer as the food industry and public health workers take their positions. Tim Lobstein reports.**

A series of papers in the *British Medical Journal* in May strongly attacked the food industry for their attempts to stop governments from recommending salt reduction. 'Rather than reformulate their products, manufacturers have lobbied governments, refused to co-operate with expert working parties, encouraged mis-information campaigns and tried to discredit the evidence,' wrote the assistant editor (*BMJ*, 312, p 1239, 18 May 1996).

Not without success, too. The 1994 COMA report on cardiovascular disease recommended a reduction in people's average daily salt intake from 9g to 6g. When drafts were leaked to industry in 1994, four major manufacturers demanded a meeting with the Department of Health. The companies were Cadbury-Schweppes, Tate and Lyle, United Biscuits and Mars. It is understood that one of their main objections was the salt recommendation. When the report was published, the food industry's trade body, the Food and Drink Federation, threatened to withdraw all co-operation on the government's *Health of the Nation* programmes unless the government dissociated itself from the salt recommendations.

The result? On the day of publication the government's chief medical officer, Sir Kenneth Calman, dissociated himself from the COMA Committee's recommendation on reducing salt, saying it was not agreed government policy (see the *Food Magazine* no 30).

The *BMJ* also published a paper from Professor Graham McGregor (St George's Medical School, London) and Professor Peter Sever (Imperial College Medical School at St Mary's, London) announcing the formation of a group called CASH — Consensus Action on Salt and Hypertension — formed to pick up where the COMA report had left off. The authors noted the fierce opposition to the evidence linking salt to high blood pressure coming from the Salt Manufacturers' Association and a public relations offshoot, the Salt Data Centre, whose members include Ranks Hovis McDougall — makers of much of our table salt, with large interests in food additives, flour milling and baked goods. RHM is now a part of Tomlins plc.

The Nutrition Task Force has also found itself unable to speak out against salt, despite a remit to advise on reducing the prevalence of high blood pressure. Its main committee included Dr M Baxendale of United Biscuits, while its sub-committee on product development (where salt was explicitly ruled off the agenda — see *Food Magazine* no 30) included representatives from the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance, the British Meat Manufacturer's Association, the Food and Drink Federation, the Margarine and Shortening Manufacturers' Association and the Snack, Nut and Crisp Manufacturers' Association.

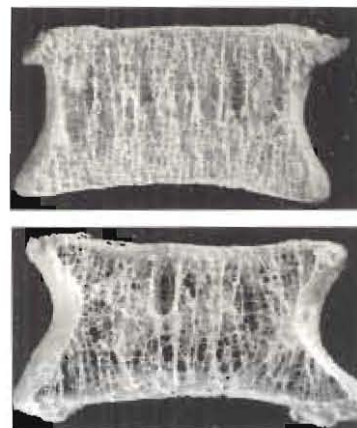
It isn't just the processed food and fast food companies with an interest in high salt diets. Salt increases thirst. So there is some interest from the soft drinks companies and the brewers and the pubs and cafes where drinks are sold. The subcommittee on fast food and restaurants, whose report barely mentioned salt (see *Food Magazine* no 32) included representatives from McDonald's, Forte, Grand Metropolitan, Burger King, soft drinks and alcohol outlets and the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association.

Perhaps we will end up with the wonderfully British compromise of permitting manufacturers to add as much salt as they like while requiring them to put a warning on the label of high-salt foods. The trouble is, the people who must advise on labels are the Food Advisory Committee of MAFF. Their current membership of fifteen includes a senior executive of Nestlé, another from the food ingredients firm Quest, another from Colman's of Norwich (Robinson's drinks), and two — the director of food regulation affairs and the director of research and development — from the brewing giant Whitbreads. All of them with an interest in salt!

CASH and their supporters will have a fight on their hands! Watch this space.

■ Contact CASH C/O Professor Graham MacGregor, Blood Pressure Unit, St George's Hospital Medical School, London SW17 0RE

■ Membership of CASH includes the following professors and doctors: P S Sever (London), N Wald (London), D G Beevers (Birmingham), H de Wardener (London), P Sleight (Oxford), M Marmot (London), P Elliot (London), C Warlow (Edinburgh), W P T James (Aberdeen), N Foulter (London), P Dodson (Birmingham), A G Shaper (London), G A MacGregor (London) and M Law (London).



Cross-section of vertebra from a 30-year old and a 60-year old woman, showing loss of bone structure

## Salt attacks bone density

Advice to increase calcium intake to prevent osteoporosis may be of little value unless salt intake is reduced. The amount of salt we eat has been found to influence the amount of calcium we lose through excretion in urine.

We accumulate calcium in our bones up to about the age of 35 when we achieve peak bone mass. From then on we start to lose calcium and our bone mass drops by about 1% per year. Although osteoporosis can affect men, it is women who are mostly affected. During menopause bone loss accelerates: they can lose as much as 6% of their bone density each year, and this can continue for 5-6 years. Osteoporosis, 'brittle bone disease', now affects almost half of all women and one in twelve men by the time they reach their seventies.

Studies of postmenopausal women have shown bone density reduction to be correlated with urinary sodium excretion (a good measure of the amount consumed): the higher the urinary sodium excretion the greater the bone loss, with increased excretion of sodium associated with greater excretion of calcium. No loss of bone was found in women excreting sodium below levels equivalent to about 5g salt per day. The researchers noted that if the women were to cut their dietary salt intake by half, this would have an effect on bone density equivalent to increasing their calcium intake by about 900mg a day, or drinking more than a pint of milk.

As the development of osteoporosis is dependent not only on the rate of bone loss, but also on the peak bone mass, it is clearly important that accumulation of bone mass is maximised. Research involving adolescent females has shown that whereas calcium intake had a significant positive link with bone density, urinary calcium excretion was linked negatively with bone density, and urinary sodium was one of the most important determinants of urinary calcium excretion. The researchers concluded that low calcium intakes and relatively high calcium losses due to high sodium intakes may reduce calcium retention in the skeleton with a concomitant reduction in peak bone mass.

■ Need et al, 1991, *Arch Intern Med*, 151, 757-759; Matkovic et al, 1995, *Am J Clin Nutr*, 62, 417-425; Devine et al, 1996, *Am J Clin Nutr*, 62, 740-745.





## USSR takes the lead

The UK may still lead much of the world in coronary heart disease death rates, but figures from the British Heart Foundation show that the former Soviet Union, the former Czechoslovakia and Hungary take the top places. And while CHD death rates have declined throughout the world, dropping in the UK by some 15-20% in the decade 1981-1991, they showed an increase in several Eastern European countries, including Poland (23%) and Romania (30%).

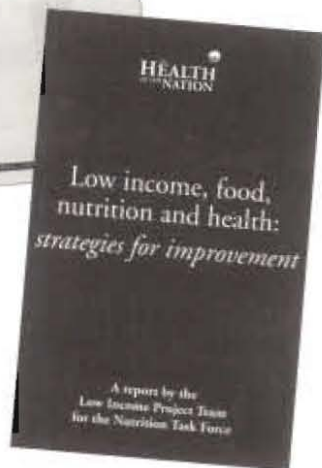
But are we just improving our treatment methods, preventing death but not preventing the disease? UK prescriptions for CHD related drugs rose from 41,400 in 1981 to 79,000 in 1994, while CHD-related surgical operations jumped from 3,000 in 1977 to 23,000 in 1993.

■ *Coronary Heart Disease Statistics*. A Boaz, S Kaduskar and M Rayner, British Heart Foundation, 14 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 4DH, 1996, £9.99, ISBN 1 899088 00 9.

## Urban plots

With nearly 90 percent of the UK population now living in urban areas, and — on some housing estates — considerable difficulty getting access to freshly-grown food, a new project from the National Food Alliance and the SAFE Alliance aims to develop city food production in low income areas.

■ Copies of the project's launch report, *Growing Food in Cities* by Tara Garnett, are available from the NFA (tel 0171 628 2442) price £10.00 inc p&p.



## CNG takes up pregnancy concerns

The nation's community dietitians are to urge the Department of Social Security to pay a premium to pregnant women to ensure they eat an adequate diet, and to pay Income Support to all claimants over the age of 16 who are pregnant, at the full adult (over 25) rate.

The Community Nutrition Group (CNG), largely comprising community dietitians working with the NHS, is drafting a series of proposals taking forward the recommendations of the report *Poor Expectations* (see the *Food Magazine* no 32) which demonstrated the difficulty faced by pregnant women trying to eat a healthy diet on basic benefits. The CNG is planning local and national action to try and improve nutrition in pregnancy.

■ CNG: contact Amanda Price (tel 01204 304012). *Poor Expectations: Poverty and Undernourishment in Pregnancy* is available from the Food Commission, price £5.50, inc 50p p&p.

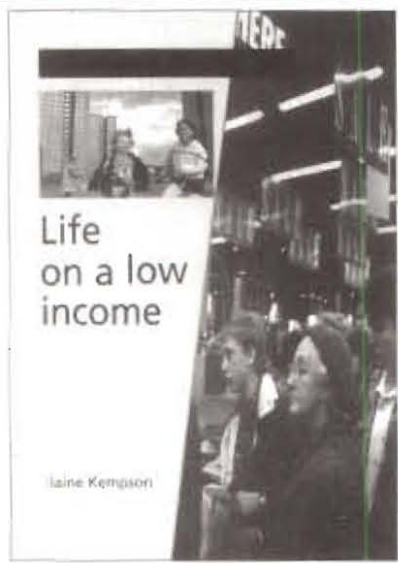
## LIPT service

In what was seen as a dismissive gesture towards low income issues, the Nutrition Task Force failed to organise a press launch for the Low Income Project Team (LIPT) report, *Low Income, Food, Nutrition and Health: Strategies for Improvement*. Instead it subsumed the launch in a press conference called to announce the formal ending of the NTF itself. The LIPT report did not even get a Department of Health press release, although the chair of the team, Dr Mike Nelson, issued his own.

Despite these snubs, and despite the distinct handicap of not being allowed to talk about the (in)adequacy of benefit levels, or to mention the word 'poverty', the report made it clear that gaining access to healthy food was strongly influenced by disposable income, along with facilities, skills and knowledge. But the project team was supposed to focus on how people can cope, as opposed to how they cannot, and so the report takes a long look at community activities and local initiatives. It suggests that greater co-ordination is needed between local initiatives (such as the National Food Alliance is now undertaking with its poverty network and database), along with greater emphasis on local authorities taking a role in co-ordinating community and retailing sectors in the development of food 'partnerships'.

Several NTF reports are still awaited, including one on school food and a consumer's guide to eating take away and fast food.

■ Copies of the report are available from the Department of Health, P O Box 410, Wetherby, LS23 7LN (CHECK).



The latest newsletter from the Food Poverty Network (no.3) is now available from NFA: (tel 0171 628 2442).

This latest report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is a survey of surveys, including housing, health, food and social exclusion. ISBN 1 899987 17 7, price £9.50.

# marketplace

## The Nursery Food Book

A lively and practical book exploring all issues relating to food, nutrition, hygiene and multicultural needs, with tips, recipes and sample menus along with cooking, gardening and educational activities involving food. Excellent handbook for nursery nurses and anyone caring for young children. £10.99 including p&p.

## Teach Yourself Healthy Eating for Babies and Children

An authoritative yet down-to-earth guide giving you the information you need to feed your family. Includes over 60 pages of excellent recipes. £6.99 inc p&p.

## The Food We Eat

The award-winning author Joanna Blythman's examination of the best and worst in British food today. £8.99 incl. p&p.

## Back issues of The Food Magazine

Back issues cost £3.50 or £30.00 for a full set of available issues. Send for index of major news stories and features in past issues. Stocks are limited and some issues are already out-of-stock.



## Additives - Your Complete Survival Guide

Still the best reference book with comprehensive tables and summaries of the evidence on the safety of each additive. Special price only £3.50 inc p&p.

## Food Irradiation

Good food doesn't need irradiating yet the UK has now legalised the process. £6.50 inc p&p.

## More than Rice and Peas

Essential guidelines for multi-cultural catering. Includes over 90 pages on specific cultural beliefs and practices and 40 pages of local projects and initiatives. £17.50 inc p&p.

## Poor Expectations

Written by The Maternity Alliance and NCH Action for Children. A devastating report on under-nutrition among pregnant women on low incomes, showing the poor diets being eaten at present and the difficulty of affording a healthy diet on Income Support. £5.50 inc p&p.

## order form

### publications

The Food We Eat .....	£8.99	<input type="checkbox"/>	More than Rice and Peas .....	£17.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Nursery Food Book .....	£10.99	<input type="checkbox"/>	Poor Expectations .....	£5.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healthy Eating for Babies & Children .....	£6.99	<input type="checkbox"/>	Full set of available back issues		
Fast Food Facts .....	£5.95	<input type="checkbox"/>	of The Food Magazine .....	£30.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additives - Complete Survival Guide .....	£3.50	<input type="checkbox"/>	Index of available back issues .....	free	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food Irradiation .....	£6.50	<input type="checkbox"/>			

### subscriptions / donations

If you are not a regular subscriber to *The Food Magazine* why not take out your own subscription and help support The Food Commission's work? *The Food Magazine* is published four times a year. Your subscription will start with our next published issue.

Individuals, schools, libraries .....	£17.50	<input type="checkbox"/>	Overseas individuals, schools, libraries .....	£25.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organisations, companies .....	£35.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	Overseas organisations, companies .....	£40.00	<input type="checkbox"/>

I have enclosed a donation of £....., to support The Food Commission's work

### payment and address details

Overseas purchasers should send payment in £ sterling, and add £2.00 per book for airmail delivery.

#### cheque payments

I have enclosed a cheque or postal order made payable to The Food Commission for £.....

#### credit card payments

We can accept *Visa*, *Access*, *Mastercard* and *Eurocard* for book orders over £8.50 and for subscriptions to *The Food Magazine*.

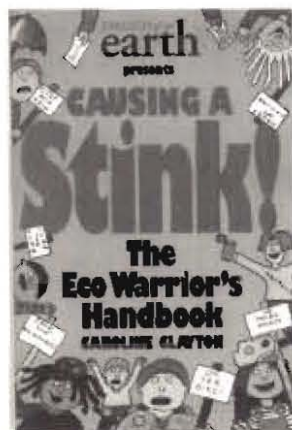
Please charge my account to the amount of £..... My credit card number is: .....

Card expiry date: ..... Card type: ..... Signature: .....

Please send your order to Publications Dept, The Food Commission, 3rd floor, 5/11 Worship Street, London EC2A 2BH.

Tel: 0171 628 7774. Fax: 0171 628 0817. Delivery will usually take place within 14 days.

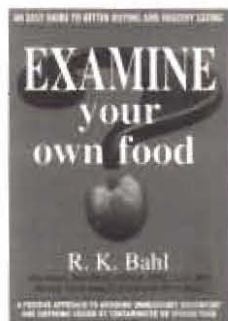
If you do not wish to cut this form out of the magazine please either photocopy it or write in giving full details of your order and delivery address.



### Causing a Stink: The Eco-Warrior's Handbook

Caroline Clayton, Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ, 1996, £3.99, ISBN 0 7475 2685 0.

Full of fun ideas and facts for children defending the planet. We especially liked the certificates that readers can send to companies, bestowing a 'Wrap Attack' Award for over-wrapping their products.



### Examine Your Own Food

R K Bahl, Food Trade Press, Station House, Hortons Way, Westerham, Kent TN16 1BZ, 1996, £17.50, ISBN 1 873893 01 9.

An odd book documenting the insights of Sainsbury's retired chief analyst, and offering buying and storage tips, along with lists of defects to watch out for. Grease on the inside of a crisp packet, for example, is caused by insufficient shaking to remove the frying oil, while the green bloom on bacon is caused by a high level of the nitrite curing salts. Great stuff for DIY food police!

### You Count, Calories Don't

L Ormichinski and M E Young, Hodder & Stoughton, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH, 1996, £9.99, ISBN 0 340 65443 0.

The manual for Diet Breakers, the group that promotes positive body images for women, this book takes its lead from both medicine and psychotherapy.

They cite medicine, for example, by showing that yo-yo dieting increases the risk of heart disease more than not trying to diet at all, and psychotherapy of the straightforward 'accept who you are' variety.

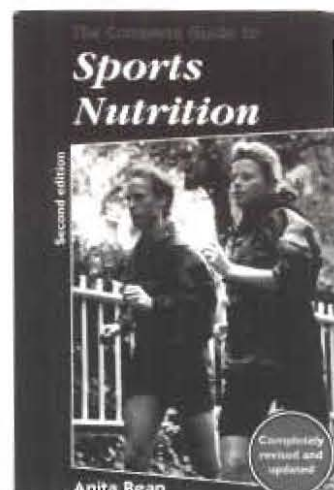
The result is a 300-page hot-pot of information and exhortation to help people live their own lives.

### Sports Nutrition (2nd Ed)

A Bean, A & C Black Ltd, 35 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4JH, 1996, £12.99, ISBN 0 7136 4388 9.

A sensible run through the mainstream body of knowledge on nutrition, exercise and dieting. It includes a useful guide to sports food supplements — most of which are dismissed as having no proven benefit.

Sports drinks are equally reduced to the simple: just dilute some fruit juice with three times the water, and add a pinch of salt.



Keep on writing but keep your letters short! You can fax us on 0171 628 0817

### McNutrients

I see McDonald's are now selling a veggie-burger. I assume it's vegetarian, but it seems a bit salty to me. Do you know what's in it?

M Edwards, Highbury

*We asked McD for a breakdown of the product. The ingredients list looks meat-free (though we can't vouch for the hot plate where it's cooked). The fat they've used in the pattie is a hydrogenated vegetable oil. There is also a dollop of hydrolysed vegetable protein (a flavour-booster like monosodium glutamate) in the pattie, and in the bun, and in the sauce!*

*And it's salty. A single serving gives you over two grams of salt — nearly forty per cent of the maximum recommended daily amount for an adult.*



### Spreading problem

I am amazed that products like Nutella and the own-brand versions can call themselves, as they do, 'hazelnut chocolate spread' or, in Sainsbury's case 'chocolate hazelnut spread'.

They do not contain proper chocolate and the hazelnut content isn't very high on the list. Is this legal?

L Scott, Grimsby

*Hazelnut chocolate spread does not appear to be a reserved name, for which specified standards are agreed, but the product should comply with the general regulations on misleading labelling. The first two ingredients constitute over 60 per cent of the product, and are sugar and vegetable oil. The hazelnut content is about 13 per cent, just a seventh of the jar-full. The word chocolate is presumably meant to imply chocolate flavoured — but that isn't at all clear.*

*In our opinion the description does appear rather misleading, but to test its legality you must ask your local authority trading standards officers to pursue the matter.*

### Drink De-regs

From the beginning of this year the legal requirement for pubs to display the alcohol content of draught beers etc has been removed (as part of the government's de-regulation initiative).

LACOTS, representing the local authority enforcement viewpoint, has asked MAFF to re-introduce this requirement with the new Food Labelling Regulations this July. MAFF has said it has received no requests from consumers or consumer groups on this subject. I find this surprising. Does the Food Commission have a view?

N A Woods, Nottingham

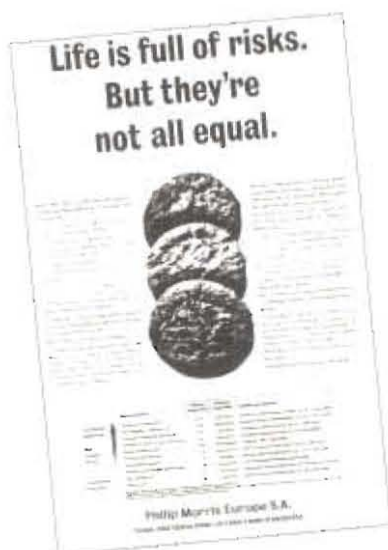
*Sorry, Mr Woods, but that one slipped past us. We also note that an EU move to get ingredients labelled on alcoholic drinks is making slow progress.*

*We oppose any removal of a consumer's right to information. Consumers are disadvantaged enough, and if the notion of a free market has any credibility it must mean a consumer has an informed choice — informed by facts. Better still are stronger food standards, required by law, but that's called by the dirty name 'regulation'.*

*To make your views known write to Denise Love, MAFF Food Labelling and Standards Division, Room 312, Ergon House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR.*

### Olestra

We've had several dozen letters supporting our campaign to stop olestra, the fat-free fat substitute, being approved in the UK. Keep writing! And see page 12.



## Taking the biscuit

An amusing advert was sprung on an unwitting public by Philip Morris, makers of Marlborough and many another cigarette.

It told us that eating one biscuit a day was 1.49 times more likely to give us heart disease than not eating a biscuit. Drinking a glass or two of milk every day was 1.62 times more likely to give us lung cancer.

In contrast, it claimed, inhaling second-hand tobacco smoke was only 1.19 times as likely to give us lung cancer.

The advert admitted that any value under 2.0 was unreliable. But it didn't mention the figure for getting lung cancer from first-hand cigarette smoke. For heavy smokers the relative risk is over 25.

It also forgot to mention that, of course, we have a bit of choice about eating a biscuit which we don't have about second-hand smoke. It might have been more appropriate to give a figure for second-hand biscuit eating!

The advertisement was also run in France, where French biscuit manufacturers successfully sued Philip Morris for defamation, winning damages of 1 franc!



**Avoid second-hand biscuit eating!**

## MAFF's Yorkie

The government put out a 'research requirements' document recently, calling for institutions and organisations to bid for contracts.

Among the many worthy scientific investigations it would like to have done are a handful on social and consumer issues. Why, for example, do people say one thing and do another? Why don't people eat more potatoes and bread? What can parents do to help their children eat more healthily?

Although suspiciously like the sort of thing that belongs in the Department of Health, we assume that MAFF will make good use of the results of such research. We are confident that this is the case because, it turns out, if you want more details on MAFF's requirements for these projects you are asked to contact one Dr N J Jardine. Who is he? He coyly gives a P O box number in York but his e-mail address is more revealing:

*nick.jardine@nestlegb.nestle.com*

## Disappearing act

A £20m Campaign for Confidence in British Food (CCBF) was announced in the *Financial Times* on June 6th. It promised to avoid being 'overly jingoistic' but will highlight the 'strictness of UK food safety legislation compared with the apparent laxity of rules in other nations'.

Oddly, the sponsors of CCBF wished to remain anonymous. They told the *FT* that they did not want their initiative 'undermined by politicians, or sacrificed on the altar of EU membership'.

A week went past, and the *FT* then published a second piece on the CCBF, citing the National Consumer Council and the Leatherhead Food Research Association, amongst others, pointing out that it isn't a public relations campaign that is needed to restore UK consumer confidence, but the bigger questions of health versus an answer to intensive farming and new technology.

Since then, silence.

## Two-fingered salute

A meals on wheels private contractor, whose name we dare not print, served up a strawberry mousse to its 120 elderly clients on June 15 1995. Two days later 26 clients had been admitted to hospital, and by June 20 the total had risen to 61 clients — all poisoned with the *Salmonella enteritidis* phage type 4 bug which cost Edwina Currie her job. It cost two of these elderly people their lives.

Environmental health officers were ready to prosecute. The strawberry mousse had been made with raw eggs. The case was one of criminal neglect.

Except the company had thrown away all the remaining mousse. None of the eggs which were supposed to come from the same batch showed contamination with salmonella.

Without the direct evidence, the company could still be prosecuted for using raw eggs, against Department of Health advice. What, asked investigating officers, was the company's policy on the use of raw eggs? What instructions did it give to catering staff?

On legal advice, the company refused to supply any information and refused to be interviewed. The legal advice paid off. Without tangible evidence, and without the details of the company's routines, the local authority was advised it would be unable to make a case stick.

## One-fingered salute

A linen serviette, a pearl bracelet and (you may not see this clearly) lacquered finger nails.



But what a place to put such a superior finger! The picture comes from an advert for Fryma cocktail sauce-, mayonnaise- and ketchup-making machinery, published in a food manufacturing trade magazine. It boasts 'consistent product quality, longer shelf life, perfect stability and homogeneity'.

They just forgot the hygiene. *Plus ça change...*

## What's in a name?

A list of lists arrived on our desk recently, giving us a price for buying the names and addresses of lists of people.

For a mere £5,600 we could have the names and addresses of nearly 60,000 vegetarians. For

£78,000 we could have a list of over half a million people who eat bran flakes and high fibre cereals. People who buy Flora (£16,000), drink 7-Up (£6,000) or shop at Gateway (£69,000)? No problem.

Except we don't even buy the

list for this money. We just get to rent it for a one-off mail shot.

Next time you fill in a form or answer a questionnaire, read the small print — and ask for a fee!