

The FOOD MAGAZINE

Campaigning for safer, healthier food for all

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Processed meats are pumped up with water

In a special *Food Magazine* survey we reveal that many everyday foods are routinely, and legally, watered down.

Food and drink is generally sold by weight or volume, which has sometimes given unscrupulous manufacturers and retailers the opportunity to bulk out products with water and other cheap ingredients, before selling the produce on at full price. By cheating the consumer the seller profits.

The deception of the public used to be so commonplace that the first Adulteration of Foods and Drinks Act was drawn up over 140 years ago, in 1860. The act was designed to protect the public from the fraudulent and often dangerous adulteration of their food. Beer and milk, two dietary staples, were

frequently watered down, often with unclean water. Bread and flour might be bulked out with plaster of paris. Tea could be mixed with hedge clippings.

An enormous weight of legislation now exists to protect the consumer, but the oldest and simplest form of adulteration is still with us – the addition of water to our food.

Manufacturers who bulk out their products with water can undercut the prices of rival firms, whilst boosting their own profits. Some would consider the use of water in this way as a deception of the public, but the law considers such adulteration legal, as long as the water is listed as an ingredient.

We looked around the supermarkets to see where we could find added water. As our survey shows, we found water in some unexpected places.



Products such as canned ham can contain an amazingly small amount of real meat. This product is just 55% meat – padded out with water, 'pork protein' (gelatine), salt, sugar and additives.

Continued on pages 6 & 7

Allotment power

When vandalism drove out the last allotment users at Forest Farm in North East London, Redbridge Council met with little success in persuading allotment users to return. So the council used the opportunity to encourage an innovative, alternative use of the space. They put up security fences and built a classroom. Instead of just allotments, they created a network of organic community gardening projects.

The site is 10 acres in total, with spaces blocked out for use by schoolchildren, people with disabilities, local allotment-users and a medicinal herb-garden, as well as a wildflower meadow with a spiral of Essex apple trees

and a wildlife pond. In addition, a plot of 100 square metres has been adopted by the Forest Farm Peace Garden. It offers refugees and asylum seekers the chance to improve mental and physical health through gardening, while fostering a supportive and diverse community. The Peace Garden has already achieved remarkable progress in its first year.

Continued on page 18



Get the facts with 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.

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Election choices

The school meals issue could be taken as an acid test of how the political parties operate.

The Tories happily abolished meal standards, indeed abolished the requirement to offer meals at all, apart from providing a minimum packed lunch for children entitled to free school meals. They also dismantled local authority meals services by requiring the contracts to be put out to the cheapest tender in the private sector, school by school.

That was the early 1980s. A decade later and Thatcher had given way to Major, and pressure from health organisations and consumers led his government to develop voluntary nutrition guidance.

When Labour took over in 1997, it promised to make school meal standards a priority. It also commissioned a report on children's nutritional needs from Professor Philip James, the brains behind the abolition of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and its replacement by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Food Standards Agency.

The James report on children was never published. Tessa Jowell, public health minister at the time, decided that she did not need advice on children's diets after all, and her staff told her that the radical proposals – including stronger nutrition and food standards for school meals and nursery meals, whole school food policies, Ofsted inspection of dinners and retention of school playing fields – 'lacked evidence', so she shelved it.

However, the message was not lost on the devolved administration in Scotland, where the high rates of heart disease and rising levels of obesity has led to progress in school food that puts the English complacency to shame.

In England, little stabs have been made, such as free fruit for five-year-olds and a set of 'guidelines' on vending machines. Otherwise the Blair government has hidden behind the mantra of choice. Yet never has 'choice' been less appropriate than when it comes to feeding children. It is as if we should give them choice over smoking by selling cigarettes at school. Or alcohol. Or guns. We don't give children choice about these.

Indeed we don't allow them to choose their MP in an election, yet we expect children to make rational choices for their health in the face of a multi-million pound food industry which advertises directly to children the most health-damaging products of the range available.

As Minette Martin* has pointed out, we have recently witnessed a bizarre reversal of the tale of the little boy who tells the emperor that he has no clothes. In the story of Jamie and the school dinners, a Naked Chef tells the puffed-up fantasists of New Labour that they are deluding themselves. They have ignored the problem for eight years, then they suddenly find £280m which they say is all new money, then they say it isn't actually new money and indeed some of it will come from Lottery funds, then they divert some of this money to a proposed School Food Trust – a non-democratic body consisting of industry representatives alongside school and parent groups, which will provide 'advice and support' for schools – a role that surely belongs directly to government.

It's a dog's dinner of a policy, made up in response to media pressure brought to a head by a TV celebrity just before an election. It's not a rational policy based on an analysis of public health needs – something the government was given and threw away in 1997.

If 'choice' is the word, whose politics do we choose? Indeed, how do we tell the difference?

* Minette Martin, School meal choice is the last thing children need. *Sunday Times*, 3rd April, 2005

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News

NHS endorsement for Panda Pops?	3
Controlling the media	4
Insurance and obesity risks	4
Baby formula health claims	5
Illegal release of GM maize	5

Meat

Meat pumped up with water	1, 6-7
Old cow back on plates	16-17

Regulation

Voluntary codes ignored	8-9
-------------------------	-----

Irradiation

French irradiation firms targeted	10
-----------------------------------	----

Marketing

Children advertise to themselves	11
Companies merge entertainment and marketing	12-13
McEntertainment	14

Advertising

Rulings from the ASA	15
----------------------	----

Society

Allotment power	1, 18
Tesco profits but workers pay a high price	18
New children's food website	19

Marketplace

Subscriptions and posters	19
---------------------------	----

Science

What the doctor reads	20
Omega-3 and obesity	21

Feedback

A dip into our mailbox	22-23
------------------------	-------

Backbites

On the lighter side...	24
------------------------	----

Sign up for emails

The Food Commission sends out occasional news and information by email. To receive such emails, please send your name to news@foodcomm.org.uk
We will not pass your name or email address to any other person or organisation.

Can the Food Commission help you?

- Are you planning non-commercial research that needs expert input on food and health?
- Do you need nutritional or product survey work to be undertaken?

The Food Commission may be able to help you. Contact Kath or Ian on 020 7837 2250.

Panda Pops *not* recommended by NHS

The manufacturer of Panda Pops has been told by the Advertising Standards Authority to stop marketing its children's drink products as if they had been endorsed by the National Health Service (NHS), and to stop claiming that its fizzy drinks are healthier than fruit juice.

The Food Commission objected to a brochure inserted in a trade magazine, distributed to school caterers, advertising a range of Panda Pops soft drinks. The brochure, published by manufacturer Hall & Woodhouse, gave the impression that Panda Pop drinks had been approved by the NHS because they were to appear in an advertorial (a paid-for article carrying a marketing message) in an NHS-branded magazine. The brochure claimed, 'Popzone has been chosen as the only soft drinks supplier to advertise in the new NHS Family Choice magazine, distributed to over 2 million families via doctors' surgeries, midwives and community nurses. Senior NHS Staff who approved the advertorial were impressed with the choice offered by the Popzone range.'

The Food Commission objected to the implication that the advertorial referred to in the brochure was approved by the NHS and to the implication that Panda Pops drinks were also approved by the NHS. Further, we were

concerned that several questionable nutrition claims in the brochure might be understood by caterers and parents as officially endorsed NHS health advice.

NHS Family Choice magazine is not published by the National Health Service, but is an independent publication designed to inform families about the choices available to them under the NHS. The ASA considered that the interchangeable use of the abbreviation 'NHS' to refer to both NHS Family Choice magazine and the National Health Service was, at best, ambiguous and, at worst, gave the misleading impression of NHS endorsement.

The Food Commission also objected to nutrition claims that appeared in the Panda Pops brochure. It compared the sugar content of Panda Pops to other drinks, giving the impression that it is healthier for children to drink Panda Pops than fruit juice.

On the question of health, the ASA considered that, by referring to the sugar content of Panda Pops as '... an optimum level for energy and health benefits ...' and stating 'Kids need a certain amount of sugar for energy,' Hall & Woodhouse implied the sugar content of Panda Pops was healthy. Because it considered that most children would not

nhs
Family
Choice
NHS Family Choice Magazine chooses
Popzone
Popzone message to reach over
2 million families via the NHS



Popzone has been chosen as the only soft drinks supplier to advertise in the new NHS Family Choice magazine - distributed to over 2 million families via doctor's surgeries, midwives and community nurses. Senior NHS Staff who approved the advertorial were impressed with the choice offered by the Popzone range

need to obtain essential calories from sugar in soft drinks, the ASA concluded that the leaflet misleadingly implied that some of the Popzone products were healthier than they were. The ASA also considered that the phrase 'Many parents choose fruit juice as a 'healthier' option for their kids, when it actually contains the same level of acid and twice the amount of sugar as a bottle of Panda Pops' implied Panda Pops were healthier than orange juice. Because it considered that the vitamins found in orange juice were important for maintaining health, the Authority concluded that the leaflet was misleading and asked the advertisers to amend it.

Support for children's food legislation grows

The call for legislation to protect children from unhealthy food and junk food marketing has gained welcome media attention and a surge of support following Jamie Oliver's high-profile exposé of the state of children's food in school.

If it becomes law, the Children's Food Bill would not only ensure that school meals and vending machines offer healthy food; it would also end junk food advertising to children, support the promotion of healthier foods, and require schools to teach cooking skills.

The Children's Food Bill campaign plans to re-introduce the Bill after the general election, with the backing of 134 national organisations (including the Food Commission) and 248 current MPs. Support from individuals will also play a crucial part in helping the Bill become law.

■ Register your support at the campaign website: www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk

Don't forget vending machines, Jamie!

The Health Education Trust (HET), which advocates a 'whole school approach' to food and nutrition, urges schools not to forget that school vending is another key aspect of school food policy. The trust is developing guidelines for schools to assist them in making appropriate vending decisions. A National School Vending Conference, jointly organised by HET and the Department of Health is scheduled for 30th June, 2005 in Peterborough.

■ Contact Jennette Higgs, Health Education Trust, PO BOX 6057, Greens Norton, Northamptonshire NN12 8GG, or visit: www.healthedtrust.com/pages/events.htm



Children's group certifies E-free meals

The Hyperactive Children's Support Group (HACSG) has welcomed the promise of improvements in school meals. The voluntary organisation supports families whose children's behaviour can be improved through improved diet.

A new HACSG Highest Standard Award has been launched, certifying meals as of high nutritional standard and excluding ingredients, such as certain E-number additives, known to trigger hyperactive behaviour. Certification following an audit by an HACSG nutritionist will entitle the caterer to carry the HACSG accreditation on all menus and other promotional material.

■ For details, contact Nick Giovannelli on 020 8946 4444; email: nickgiovannelli@aol.com

Controlling the media

We rarely congratulate *The Sun* newspaper on the accuracy of its reporting, but a recent exposé was spot on. While the BBC and several papers ran a story telling us that an 'independent think tank', the Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC) in Oxford, had found that the obesity epidemic was not as bad as everyone thought, and slammed groups like the International Obesity Task Force for over-egging the issue, only *The Sun* took the trouble to look behind the headlines.

The SIRC is not as independent as its publicity would have us believe. It has received funding from Cadbury-Schweppes, HP-Danone, Kelloggs, Masterfoods (Mars) and the sugar-industry funded Sugar Bureau. In turn it sponsors activities run by *Spiked*,

one of a group of organisations linked to *Living Marxism* and ex-Trotskyists who have, according to George Monbiot moved further to the right than the neo-cons in the White House in their support for pro-corporate libertarianism.

The Sun didn't say all this of course. But it did show a scowling picture of SIRC director Peter Marsh alongside his sponsor, Tony the Tiger.



Two views of the same story: how the SIRC's 'independence' was exposed

Insurance companies face obesity risks

A review by securities advisor Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein (DKW) has identified a range of risks faced by insurance companies as the obesity epidemic grows.

Most exposed are life insurers and health insurers. Obesity is linked to a wide range of health disorders which can incur high medical costs, such as diabetes (renal failure costs over £35,000 a year in dialysis treatment), cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, high blood pressure, bone and joint problems, gall bladder disease, fatty liver disease and other minor and major medical problems. The company estimates that heart disease deaths in the US are already 50% higher than they would be if obesity levels remained at their early 1980s level. The insurance giant Swiss Re estimated that obesity contributed significantly to their additional costs in 2003 of some 383m Swiss francs (£170m).

In addition, DKW are concerned about liability claims being made against food companies and their insurers and re-insurers. If any of the claims against fast food companies for contributory negligence or misrepresentation hold in court then the costs could be high. The multi-billion pound law suits against tobacco companies have concentrated insurers' minds on whether food companies are exposing themselves to risks.

DKW illustrates its concerns by giving four examples where food companies may be vulnerable: marketing, additives, addictive foods and trans fats. While the marketing risks are clear, those from additives are more obscure. DKW is worried about possible allergy, hyperactivity and cancer caused by

additives, but might be more worried if it could be shown how additives are used to market foods that provide little or no nutritional value – their purpose is to turn sugar and water into attractive fruit-flavoured soft drinks, for example, or to colour the fat in a sausage red to make it look like lean meat.

The problem of addiction opens up new risks for food companies. Recent research has found cheese to contain traces of opiates (casomorphines) and phenylethylamine, a chemical related to amphetamines, which is also found in chocolate. If food companies manipulate these foods to make them last longer, to look and taste appealing, and to aggressively market these foods, they could be vulnerable to prosecution.

Trans fats are potentially health damaging, and are created artificially and added to food

for the manufacturer's benefit to prolong the shelf life of a fatty product. Trans fats are not included in the nutrition panel on food labels but should be declared in the ingredients list – but some major sources of trans fats have no ingredients list, such as pastries and pies sold loose, and deep-fried fast food.

Liability, warns DKW, could extend to retailers and advertising agencies involved in distributing and marketing foods, and TV companies and newspapers for carrying the advertisements. Even sports event organisers which promote risky products could find their insurers withdrawing liability protection.

■ DKW, *Insurance: Weighing up the consequences of obesity, 2004.*

Health insurer refunds your healthy choices

Dutch health insurer VGZ has announced a scheme to refund its clients up to €40 (£28) a year if they buy foods containing added sterols.

VGZ, one of the Netherlands largest health insurance companies and covering over two million people in Holland, will refund the costs of margarines, yogurt and milk made with added sterols sold by

Unilever under the Becel pro.activ label. It believes that it can cut its current health payments, including costs of €35m (£23m) in payments for cholesterol-lowering drugs for 120,000 of its policyholders each year.

A Unilever spokesman said that VGZ came up with idea alone, but hoped other insurance companies would follow their lead.



Dutch insurers believe sterols work

The market's view of food

The latest joke going around the environmental lobbies? A report from an American conference of economists where the problems of global warming were dismissed by one delegate: *'Climate change will have only a small impact on the US because it will only affect agriculture, and agriculture is just 3% of GDP.'*

The poor are starving? Let them eat GDP!

MRSA a problem for farmers

If you think the superbug MRSA is just a problem for hospitals, think again. The British Veterinary Association has just warned farmers that they 'should not panic' over findings that MRSA is now being found in animal populations.

BVA spokeswoman Dr Freda Scott-Park assured us that 'those who undertake hygienic precautions are at minimal risk'. As if!

Irish food industry told to reduce salt

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland has challenged Irish food companies and retailers to reduce salt in processed foods, and to invest in the development of healthier products. The authority also recommended improved labels.

A new FSA Ireland report, published in April, found that Irish consumers eat twice as much salt as they should, and that meat and bread products make the biggest contribution to salt intake. The report affirmed a direct link between dietary salt intake and raised blood pressure – a significant contributory factor to heart disease, which is now responsible for around 41% of all Irish deaths.

Bread contributed about a quarter of an adult's daily salt intake, second only to meat products, which contributed almost 30%. A host of other salty processed foods such as breakfast cereals, biscuits and dairy products were also highlighted in the report.

'In the long-term, FSA Ireland will seek global industry reductions in salt added during processing of up to one third,' said the authority's chief executive John O'Brien. *'This will be a technical challenge, and requires a long-term action plan and research investment by industry. The onus is on the food industry to reduce salt levels in food in order to safeguard public health in the future.'*

The report supported labelling that identifies high salt foods, as advocated by the UK's Food Standards Agency. It also suggested education initiatives and reformulation of processed food to wean people off salt. However, it did not support the use of low-sodium potassium salt in products, arguing that salt substitutes do little to reduce people's 'salt taste threshold', and this is seen as the ultimate goal.

Health claims for baby formula?

Proposals for a new European Commission Directive on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes are causing alarm amongst NGOs and health professional bodies throughout Europe. If the Directive proceeds, manufacturers will be allowed to promote breastmilk substitutes with health and nutrition claims (in violation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes) and to place new formulations onto the market before their safety or expected benefit has been conclusively demonstrated.

In 2000, EU Heads of States agreed to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010' and in pursuit of this goal the Commission seems prepared to put the interests of the baby food industry over the interests of infants. MEPs, leading NGOs in the UK and Europe (such as BEUC, EPHA, IBFAN, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Standing Committee of Nurses in the EU) the UK Government and many Member States, are all calling on the Commission to reconsider.

Health and nutrition claims on foods for infants and young children undermine breastfeeding by implying equivalency or

health benefits for breastmilk substitutes. Nutrition and health claims are not the same as nutrition information (which is essential).

If ingredients have proven health benefits, they should be legally required in all products given to artificially-fed infants. However, the Commission's proposals turn this concept on its head, by suggesting that an infant's health and development should depend on the whims of marketing and on a mother's chance of noticing and understanding a health or nutrition claim.

Research continues to mount about the risks of artificial infant feeding to both short- and long-term health and its role in the rise of obesity. A seven-year study by the World Health Organization (WHO) shows babies exclusively breastfed for six months are healthier and leaner than artificially fed babies. WHO is concerned that the growth charts based on artificially fed babies have encouraged overfeeding.

■ **Baby Milk Action is coordinating the lobby to strengthen the Directive. For more information call 01223 464420, email prundall@babymilkaction.org or visit www.babymilkaction.org**

GM maize illegally released in EU

The biotech company Syngenta announced in March that it had accidentally released an unapproved genetically modified (GM) maize into the European environment and food chain.

The European Commission confirmed that 1,000 tonnes of the unapproved GM maize, called Bt10, was imported into the EU and grown in French and Spanish test sites. Whilst it is not yet clear whether any of the maize entered human food, it is possible that farm animals may have consumed the unapproved variety. No products have yet been recalled.

Bt10 has no approval for commercial release in either the US or EU. Bt10 contains antibiotic resistant marker genes, used by genetic engineers to identify which plants have taken up an engineered trait. The use of antibiotic resistant marker genes is being phased out in the EU due to concerns about the possible risks of antibiotic resistance transferring to bacteria.

'We are faced with a potentially harmful, illegal release of a GM crop in the EU where antibiotic resistant marker genes are being banned,' commented Pete Riley, Director of the Five Year Freeze – a coalition campaign calling for a moratorium on GM crops until safety concerns are addressed. *'The EC and UK Government and its agencies have failed to detect and prevent this unapproved GM crop entering the food chain and environment.'*

The Five Year Freeze has challenged the UK's environment minister Elliot Morley over the Syngenta incident. It asked what actions the UK government has taken to ensure that Bt10 contaminated products are removed from the food chain, and whether the government or Food Standards Agency was considering prosecuting Syngenta for the illegal importation of unapproved products.

A further blow to the biotech industry was dealt in April with the publication of new in-depth focus-group research on public attitudes to GM crops for non-food production. Undertaken by the Agricultural Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC), the research revealed that the majority of participants rejected the use of GM non-food crops and supported a precautionary approach to the introduction of GM crops.

Participants were asked to consider GM crop use for renewable energy, dental caries and bioplastic for packaging materials.

Arguments that GM improved economics or efficiency were not considered sufficiently significant to prompt acceptance of GM. Participants felt that long-term risks of GM were unknown and potentially irreparable.

■ **Contact the Five Year Freeze on 020 7837 0642; email: enquiry@fiveyearfreeze.org**

Pump it up!

It is perfectly legal to sell watered-down food to unsuspecting shoppers, as long as you describe the water as an ingredient in the small print. The *Food Magazine's* Ian Tokelove went looking for watery meat, and found the shelves awash.

Bacon and gammon

Most of the bacon we eat in the UK has been wet-cured, a preservative process which increases the meat's water content by 5-7%. To prevent unscrupulous producers adding extra amounts of water during the curing process, legislation restricts bacon to a maximum of 10% added water before a declaration of 'added water' needs to be made. However, rather than restricting the use of added water, this law actively encourages producers to add water until they hit the 10% limit. After all, if a producer can sell water for the same price as bacon they can literally make money by turning on a

tap, and if they don't to it, their competitors will.

If you check the bacon and gammon products on sale in your local supermarket (including the pre-packaged joints) you will find that almost every packet contains only 87% meat. The remaining 13% is mostly added water (up to 10%) along with salt, phosphate additives (to retain the added water) and preservatives. This is why most bacon spits and sizzles so much when it hits hot oil, just as a drop of water spits if dropped into hot oil.

Many of the supermarkets also sell 'rounds' and 'plates' of gammon and bacon. These tend to contain much more water than regular bacon. Sainsbury's Gammon Plate Steaks state that they contain 'not more than 10% added water' but this doesn't take account of the 10% water which has already, legally, been added to the meat. These steaks are only 76% meat, the rest is water and additives. ASDA's bacon rounds are similar, being just 78% meat. The packet admits to containing 'added water' but doesn't say how much.



Ham and water

Like bacon, ham frequently contains added water, but often in much larger quantities. Traditionally ham is carved from the whole hind leg of a pig, but these days you're much more likely to find 'reformed' ham, which has been finely chopped and mixed with water and other extras.

On the cover we pictured a canned ham from Ye Olde Oak which was just 55% meat. The company also sells a 'Premium Ham' which is only 70% meat – is this really the best they can offer?

Ye Olde Oak aren't the only company to sell us water instead of ham. Princes sell a ham that is only 61% meat, and Mattessons have targeted the children's market with Thomas Shaped Ham Slices that are just 78% meat. Cheestrings also

sell a Ham Wrap aimed at the school lunchbox, containing 'ham' that is only 80% meat. We, and our children, deserve better.



You might think ham slices sold for children's lunchboxes would be 100% meat, but these products have cut the meat content by 20%.

Chicken

Regular *Food Magazine* readers will be familiar with tales of 'Dutched' chicken that contained up to 45% added water. You're unlikely to find such gross adulteration on supermarket shelves,



but you may still be surprised at what you can find. Bernard Matthews, for example, is a great fan of adding water to meat. His American Fried Chicken makes no declaration of added water on the front of the packet and yet it contains a paltry 62% real chicken meat – padded out with water, starch, lactose, milk protein and vegetable oil. The same company also sells a so-called 'Premium' packet of chicken breast which we purchased for £2.59. For this you get ten slices of something that is 80% chicken and 20% water mixed with potato starch, lactose, milk protein and additives. Having the cheek to sell water as meat has done Bernard Matthews well – he currently has an estimated personal fortune of £316m.



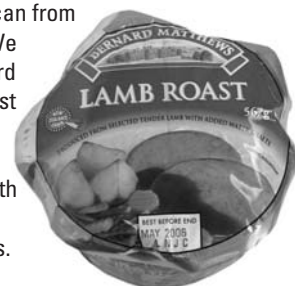
What's in a hot dog?

Have you ever wondered what hot dogs are made of? One would obviously expect to find meat, but what sort?

It turns out that most hot dogs are made from 'mechanically separated' chicken flesh, mixed with water, a little pork, and a wide range of starches, collagens and additives. These Ye Olde Oak Hot Dogs are less than 50% 'meat', if one excludes the pork collagen, beef collagen, pork fat... yummm!

Lamb

Lamb is such a cheap, abundant meat that you'd think there would be no need to bulk it out with added water. And indeed there is no need, unless you're determined to squeeze as much cash as you can from rushed shoppers. We purchased a Bernard Matthews lamb roast for £3.99 and found it was just 86% meat, bulked out with water, salt and phosphate additives.





Economy lines

Most supermarkets stock a line of low-cost economy products, aimed at the shopper on a restricted budget. Such lines can offer good value for money, especially when they include fresh fruit and vegetables. Unfortunately this good value does not always extend to their low-cost meats.

This 'Smart Price Chicken Roll' from ASDA is only 58% chicken, padded out with water and potato starch.

Meanwhile this cooked ham from Sainsbury's 'basics' range weighs in at 75% meat, but is at least honest enough to give some indication of how much extra water you're getting ('not more than 20% added water' according to the label).

Who's been messing with our sausages?

There's nothing like a proper British banger, but finding the real thing is becoming increasingly difficult. Homemade sausages are made from meat, rusk, fat and seasonings with no added water. But if a manufacturer can sell us water instead of relatively expensive sausage meat they are going to give it a go. After all, if they don't cut corners, their competitors might.

The 'traditional style Irish recipe' sausages pictured right are typical of the family sausages sold in UK supermarkets. They contain only 37% meat. Almost two thirds of these sausages consist of water mixed with rusk, fat, starches, additives and various other ingredients, including a red colouring to give the sausage a meaty look.

The use of water in sausages isn't restricted to cheaper products either, the 'Extra Special' sausages also pictured are just 70% meat. The next largest ingredient is water, soaked up by breadcrumbs and held in place by a phosphate additive.

If you like your sausages shop around and look for sausages that contain at least 70% meat and are free of water – we think you'll notice the difference.



Cheap and cheerful or 'extra special', but both packs of sausages contain added water

The 5% rule

Water is the principle component of many of the foods we eat each day, and is widely used in food manufacturing processes. The addition of water to food is so common that the law allows all food sold in the UK to contain up to 5% added water without having to declare it as an ingredient. For example, cornflakes (a seemingly dry food) typically contain 3% water but water does not need to be listed as an ingredient.

Whilst most honest food manufacturers would not dream of sneaking extra water into their products, we do wonder if less scrupulous manufacturers might not be taking advantage of this law to pad out their products with an undeclared 5% water.

and the 5% declaration

Where there is one rule there is often another, and in this case there is a special rule for certain meat products. Cooked, cured meats such as ham or turkey that contain more than 5% added water must declare the added water in the name of the food. For example a product would be called 'Ham with added water' rather than 'Ham'. Rather than openly admit to adding water, some manufacturers choose to put the full product name in small type on the back of the packet, so that the 'added water' is only apparent to those who examine the package in fine detail. A variation on this rule also applies to uncooked, cured meats like bacon, which are allowed to contain up to 10% added water before they must declare the 'added water' in their name.

Turkey – trick or treat?

Turkey was once largely restricted to a Christmas treat but intensive farming has allowed a proliferation of cheap, turkey-based products, mostly produced by the Bernard Matthews company.

We didn't have to look far for added water. Bernard Matthew's Wafer Thin Turkey Ham boasts that it was a Slimming Magazine Winner in 2004, and if you look at the ingredients you can see why – it's just 60% meat! There's plenty of extra water in this product, perhaps as much as 30%, but without any quantitative declaration of added water there's no way for the inquisitive shopper to find out.

Product innovation is an important part of the Bernard Matthews success story. The company has diversified its product range and now sells turkey in all sorts of shapes and forms. For instance, turkey legs aren't what one imagines when thinking of a traditional 'roast': Bernard Matthews now sells a 'Quality' Turkey Leg Roast that is less than

three quarters meat, heavily bulked out with added water, lactose and milk protein.

Product innovation also gave rise to the infamous Turkey Twizzlers which contain a mere 34% turkey. These too are plumped up with added water, but without the benefits of a science lab there's no way to tell how much.

Dairylea Lunchables also have a turkey product. As with many children's lunchbox products the meat has been highly diluted, and contains just 58% turkey, pumped up with water, starch and additives.



Turkey ham from Bernard Matthews is just 60% meat. Turkey sold by Dairylea is only 58% meat.

Making it stick – keeping water in meat

Getting water into meat and fish products is a specialised process which can involve soaking, tumbling and injection. Getting the water to stay in the product is another trick altogether, and typically involves the use of water retaining additives commonly referred to as phosphates. The additives E450 (diphosphates), E451 (triphosphates) and E452 (polyphosphates) bind water to meat and fish products and act as emulsifiers,

allowing water and fat to blend more smoothly in meat mixtures such as sausages.

Manufacturers argue that such additives improve the succulence and textural quality of meat and fish products by retaining moisture. Shoppers might be more interested to note that 'ham' and 'turkey' can now be less than 60% meat, swollen with added water, phosphates and other unexpected extras.

'Voluntary' redefin

When problems are identified in the food chain – whether in agricultural practice, animal welfare, processing and food labelling and marketing – they can be addressed either by voluntary or statutory regulation. Voluntary agreements are favoured by government, in the face of a food industry that is hugely resistant to statutory regulation.

In the regulation of tobacco advertising, voluntary approaches were attempted. Yet in such a competitive and lucrative market, the voluntary agreements were flouted, circumvented, and creatively turned on their heads by companies and their PR agencies seeking to gain market share. Voluntary regulation failed and a statutory ban on tobacco marketing was eventually – perhaps inevitably – introduced.

In similar vein, the campaign group Baby Milk Action has catalogued dozens of infringements of an international code of practice on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes. In the UK, where the code has statutory status, companies can be prosecuted for marketing such products to mothers. However, in other countries the same companies face little more than a frown and a slap on the wrist for promoting the supposed 'benefits' of bottle feeding.

In the light of such experiences, the Food Commission has become increasingly concerned that even the most simple of voluntary agreements are being flouted by food companies. They undermine the good efforts made by more progressive companies, and reveal the voluntary approach for what it really is – a licence for some food companies to continue doing exactly what they want without fear of reprisal. This is especially concerning in the light of planned action to tackle nutrition labelling and children's food marketing.

Voluntary agreements have recently been advocated by the government's Food Standards Agency (FSA) for 'traffic light' labelling of foods – helping consumers to identify those high in fat, salt or sugar. The proposed scheme would see voluntary adoption of a single labelling design with national nutritional standards, easily recognisable and understood in all shops and on all products.

Sadly, early signs are that food companies and retailers prefer to develop their own individual labelling schemes, meaning that consumers will be faced by a myriad of designs and nutritional interpretations. This can surely only add to the labelling confusion. Under a voluntary agreement, the FSA will

have no power to influence the labelling or to insist on a coordinated approach.

This spring, the Department of Health signalled in its plans for implementation of its public health White Paper that it would prefer to see the advertising industry self-regulate than to impose a ban on junk food marketing to children. They said that statutory regulation might be considered if the industry does not shape up by 2007. In a highly competitive market place, what hope will there be for weak voluntary regulation? Indeed, how could an individual company risk taking action to curb its marketing unless it was absolutely sure that its competitors would collaborate?

On these pages, we look at examples of simple voluntary codes that some companies have failed to adhere to. We ask: what hope for more complex agreements, such as those proposed for 'traffic light' labelling and children's food marketing? Statutory regulation is surely the sensible way forward.

■ **An analysis of voluntary regulation is soon to be published by Sustain, which is pressing for statutory regulation of children's food and junk food marketing. For details of the report, contact Charlie Powell on 020 7837 1228; email: charlie@sustainweb.org**

'Inherently misleading' description sneaks back onto packs

Ten years ago, the Food Advisory Committee reviewed food labelling and identified 'percentage fat free' claims as 'inherently misleading', recommending that they 'should not be used'. The government hoped that companies would adopt this recommendation voluntarily and, indeed, many have.

The government committee found products claiming to be 90% or 85% fat free, presumably relying on some people's lack of mathematical skill to realise that these products might be 10% or 15% fat.

To make a genuine low-fat claim products can be no more than 3% fat. If a low fat claim appears on a product with more than 3% fat, the company can be prosecuted for a false claim (separate rules apply to some products such as fat spreads).

Concerns were also voiced about percentage fat free claims being associated with high salt or high sugar products – giving the misleading impression that a product is an all-round healthy choice.

So what did the Food Commission find when we went shopping? Many examples of

products claiming to be '99% fat free' – some of them high in sugar or salt, Bowyers sausages branded as '95% fat free' and Sainsbury's Bramley apple pies claiming to be '90% fat free'. So much for the success of a voluntary code of practice!



ned as 'ignore this'

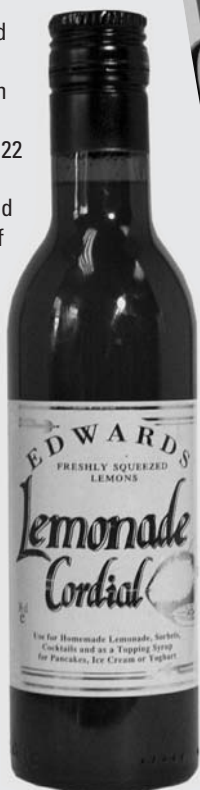
Fresh and pure?

Over recent years, concern has been raised by organisations such as the Food Standards Agency, Food Advisory Committee and consumer groups about the accuracy, consistency and format of certain descriptions used to promote fruit juices, juice drinks and similar products.

These include claims relating to the fruit, such as 'pure', 'fresh' and 'freshly squeezed'; and descriptions relating to claimed health benefits of the product, such as nutrient content and 'five a day' claims. Despite Department of Health guidance, for instance, that fruit juice can count towards only one portion of the recommended 'five a day', several mainstream smoothie and juice companies still persist in claiming that their products can contribute two portions, seeking to give their high-value products more everyday appeal.

Similar problems persist with the voluntary guideline that should restrict the use of the term 'freshly squeezed on juice products. According to FSA guidance, the description 'freshly squeezed' should be reserved for juice with a shelf-life of less than 14 days. However, in a survey conducted in 2004, the Food Commission found several products described with the term 'freshly squeezed' that had a shelf life of up to 22 months, and the term 'freshly pressed' applied to products with a shelf life of up to 25 months. Freshly squeezed juices command a price premium for their quality and taste, so the temptation is high to use it on products with a long shelf life. What price a voluntary restriction on the use of this description?

This lemonade contains 'freshly squeezed lemons' with a not-so-fresh shelf life of at least 22 months!



Nestlé adds salt to support heart health?

Nestlé's promotional campaigns tell us that low-salt wholegrain Shredded Wheat can help keep hearts healthy. Health claims are governed by a voluntary code of practice coordinated by the Joint Health Claims Initiative (JHCI). However, Nestlé also links the heart-health claim to medium and high salt cereal brands. What should consumers make of heart-health claims appearing on salty food? This confused message is discouraged by the JHCI's code of practice.

The Shredded Wheat brand has long been associated with heart health promotions – one of which resulted in a court case in 2000, which saw Nestlé prosecuted by trading standards for making illegal medicinal claims for Shredded Wheat.

Steering away from medicinal disease-prevention claims, Nestlé now emphasises the role that wholegrain foods can play in maintaining heart health. The company's latest health claims are based on evidence that people who eat wholegrain foods are more likely to maintain healthy hearts, as part

of a low fat diet and healthy lifestyle. This advice is based on a scientific review and wording approved by the JHCI, governed by a voluntary code of practice

for companies wishing to use approved claims.

JHCI is an organisation formed of consumer, industry and trading standards representatives working to ensure that claims are used to support better health, and are not undermined by use on nutritionally questionable products. For this reason, the JHCI guidelines advise companies not to use approved health claims on high fat, high sugar or high salt foods. On promotional packs, Nestlé even cites the Joint Health Claims Initiative as a reference.

Shredded Wheat is a low salt product, with no salt added. However, Nestlé's healthy heart claims also appear on medium salt Nestlé Shreddies (0.4g of sodium per 100g) and high salt Nestlé Cheerios (0.6g of sodium per 100g). The Food Standards Agency defines 0.5g of sodium per 100g as 'a lot', and the JHCI uses this guideline for its own judgement of products that may be unsuitable to carry health claims.

Consuming high levels of salt has been linked to raised blood pressure, which in itself is a risk factor for coronary heart disease. Sound advice to maintain heart health would be to cut back on high salt foods, especially those likely to be eaten every day, such as salty breakfast cereals.

Can a voluntary agreement stop health claims appearing on a high salt product? It appears not.

■ For information about the Joint Health Claims Initiative, see: www.jhci.org.uk



Cheerios contain 0.6g of sodium in every 100g, making them a product containing 'a lot' of salt according to FSA guidelines. This cereal contains the same amount of sodium per 100g as Walkers Ready Salted crisps.

it can be difficult to take the necessary steps. But studies show that "people with

healthy hearts tend to eat more whole grain foods".

So eating whole grain cereals like  ,  or  , may be an

easy way to help keep your heart healthy.

French activists target irradiation firms

Simultaneous protests were held outside seven irradiation plants across France on March 5, calling for a ban on the irradiation of food.

Rules on food irradiation vary between European countries. France and the UK allow a broad range of foods to be irradiated. French law permits irradiation of herbs and spices, poultry meat, dried fruit and vegetables, flaked cereals, frozen frogs legs, rice flour, frozen or dried egg whites, shrimps and some raw milk cheeses. An estimated five million kilograms of food are irradiated each year in France.

The protests were coordinated by ten environment, consumer and trade union groups, their placards declaring 'Radioactivity: Not on our plates'. They urged government to insist on clearer declarations on food labels and ban the use of benign-sounding substitute descriptions such as 'ionisation' or 'cold pasteurisation'.

Irradiation is the treatment of food or ingredients by exposure to ionising radiation – usually from a radioactive source, although electron beams can also be used. Irradiation kills bacteria, mould and insects and can slow the ripening or sprouting process in fruits and vegetables. The treatment is widely used in America, especially for beef, and required for imports from certain countries.

Campaigners in the US and Europe (including the Food Commission, which led a lobby to the European Parliament in 2002), have vigorously opposed irradiation of foods because they say the process can cover up lax hygiene practices, allow old food to be 'cleaned up' and returned to the food chain, destroys beneficial vitamins, and can result in the creation of carcinogenic chemicals in irradiated products, especially those containing fat.

In the European Union, there is a restricted list of foods that can be irradiated for human consumption. The European Commission has yet to decide



'Non' to food irradiation – masked protestors spell out the need for an 'Eco Alerte' in a demonstration outside the Gammaster irradiation plant, Marseilles.

whether to extend the list or impose further restrictions. In practice, currently only a very few irradiated foods or ingredients reach UK shelves, and these should be labelled as irradiated. However, several trading standards surveys in recent years have revealed irradiated products on sale in the UK – including prawns and herbal supplements.

The organisers of the French protests also pointed out that irradiation allows food and agriculture multinational companies to artificially lengthen the lifespan of food, enabling them 'to delocalise production to the detriment of the farmers of North and the South while adding to global warming'. They expressed concern about the danger of radioactive material contaminating irradiation plant workers and local residents – the risks being increased by 'frequent transport of radioactive materials'.

The Food Commission continues to support a pan-European campaign for a ban on food irradiation. As we have always argued: Good food does not need irradiating.

Irradiation in Europe

There are 23 irradiation facilities in the EU – seven in France, five in Germany, two in Spain, two in the Netherlands, two in Poland, one in the UK (Swindon, Wiltshire) and one each in Belgium, Italy, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Some of these specialise in the treatment of particular foodstuffs such as herbs and spices. Others treat a huge range of food products. One plant in the Czech Republic, for instance, is approved for the treatment of dried aromatic herbs, spices, seasoning, potatoes, onions, shallots, garlic, pulses, dried vegetables, raw vegetables, fresh fruit, fresh mushrooms, rhubarb, dried fruit, milled flakes and germs of cereals, milk products, rice flour, gum arabic, dried animal blood, plasma, coagulates, egg white and casein.

The irradiation plant in the UK is licensed to irradiate 'certain herbs and spices' but not other foodstuffs. Such herbs and spices must be labelled as irradiated if sold to the public, but if used as minor ingredients in other products, such as a pizza or lasagne, there is no requirement for the label to say that the product contains irradiated ingredients.

- For the European campaign against food irradiation, see: www.irradiation.info
- For the full list of EU irradiation plants, with addresses, see: http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biosafety/irradiation/approved_facilities_en.pdf



In this French cartoon the chicken has been 'battery-raised, fed with GM products, irradiated and frozen' while the consumer is 'a multinational's guinea pig, conditioned, battered and fed disinformation'

Children encouraged to advertise to themselves

When advertisers defend marketing to children, they often claim that children can tell the difference between advertising and entertainment. Children are able, so the argument goes, to apply a critical eye and judge the advertising messages for their persuasive intent. Their critical judgement is triggered by recognising the advertising as separate from the television programmes, story books and everyday objects that make up their childhood world.

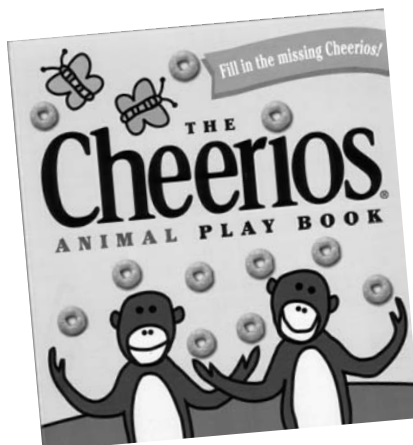
So what should children make of some of the latest product promotions targeted at them? How should they distinguish between marketing and entertainment when these are woven into one and the same thing?

An example of blurred boundaries in food advertising is the Frosties branded kitchen towels shown below. What better way to ensure that a child is repeatedly exposed to Tony the Tiger imagery than to print him again and again on kitchen roll? In this way, the Frosties brand can become an accepted part of a child's everyday landscape.

Meanwhile, a new promotion for Nestlé Milkybar encourages parents to collect tokens for a 'personalised story book', in which a child's name is printed into a book involving the Milkybar Kid and his friends. As the child reads the book they advertise to themselves and are likely build up positive – even lifelong – associations with the Milkybar brand.

The story book tokens appear on products aimed at very young children, such as Milkybar bars and Milkybar Buttons, branded as 'a delicious source of milk goodness'.

Nestlé says that Milkybar is 'trusted by Mums



and benefits from its association with goodness, purity and security'. However, milk powder is only the second ingredient (26%) after sugar. The confectionery is 57% sugar and 20% saturated fat.

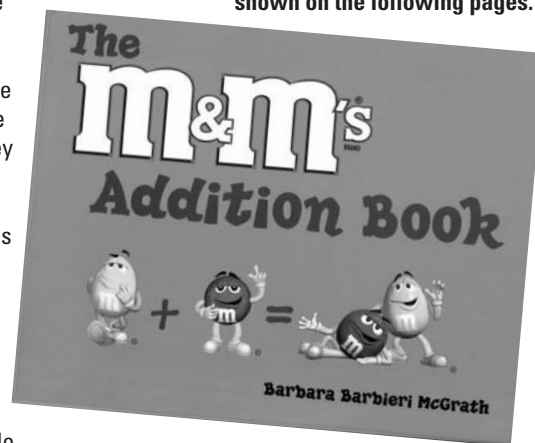
Meanwhile, branded food products are creeping into the hands and minds of the very youngest children - even before they learn to read. The Food Commission has examples of books for toddlers integrating real food products into stories and games, such as M&Ms and Lovehearts sweets and Cheerios cereal. In one example, shown here, toddlers are encouraged to put real Cheerios cereal pieces into specially cut holes on the page. An M&Ms addition book encourages older children to learn simple mathematical calculations by counting M&Ms confectionery.

Through these promotions, the child interacts in play with the objects and brands,

in an open and engaged mood which makes them at their most receptive to learning and suggestion. It's an advertiser's dream.

This spring, the government said that it hoped food advertisers would take a more responsible attitude to food promotions to children, with a vague threat that regulation might be considered if advertisers had not shaped up by 2007. However, the Food Commission remains concerned that the government may focus its attention only on TV advertising, and fail to address the ways in which food marketing is 'slipping sideways' into other forms that invade children's lives.

■ More examples of how brands are crossing the boundaries between advertising, entertainment and learning experiences are shown on the following pages.



Your child's name can be printed as a hero in a Milkybar story book. Nestlé uses this as a sneaky way of encouraging your child to do their marketing work for them.



Companies merge entertainment



Companies are becoming increasingly interested in reaching children at home – and one highly effective way of doing this is to use websites. Not only do they have a global reach, they are also likely to be used by children without direct parental supervision, because adults are usually not around to help children recognise or interpret the marketing messages. Indeed, many adults might have difficulty distinguishing the marketing messages from the entertainment, since they are often one and the same thing. Examples that the Food Commission has spotted in recent months are shown on these pages.

This summer Disney, the giant media company, will launch a new website called Virtual Magic Kingdom, where children will be able to: 'chat, play and trade with friends', 'decorate your own (virtual) room and mix music', and 'compete with other players in our Pirates and Fireworks games'.

What the early version of the website does not mention is that Disney plans the site to be an opportunity for 'advergaming' – interactive internet games carrying commercial messages. The first version is due to be launched in May as part of an 18-month global initiative, targeting children aged 8 to 12 years old.

Disney has not yet announced what sort of advertising the new site will carry, but the focus is likely to be on promoting Disney theme parks. Kids will also earn online points within the Virtual Magic Kingdom that can be redeemed for products at a 'real' Disney Magic Kingdom. As the president of Walt Disney Parks Jay Rasulo explains, 'We hope it becomes a real hangout for preteens and teens.'

Advergaming is a growing phenomenon on websites aimed at children, and in computer games. The website Neopets.com, for instance, offers children virtual cartoon pets (134 million have already been claimed) which they navigate through games and adventures to earn points. Marketing messages and paid-for advertisements are integrated throughout the website. Responding to a technique known in the marketing trade as 'Immersive Advertising', children are encouraged to build up a 'wish list' of products from the Neopets catalogue – toys and souvenirs relating to the Neopets characters from the online game – for their parents to pay for later.

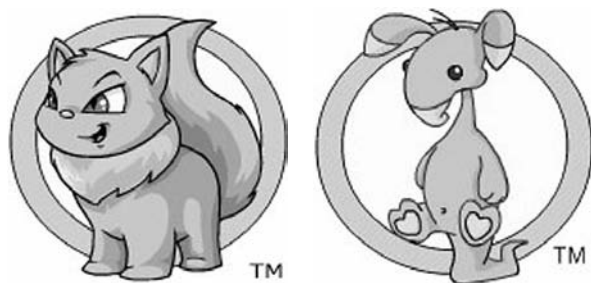
Big food brands are also investing in online advergaming. A current Frosties cereal promotion features an online sports game in which cartoon characters compete in a virtual stadium adorned with Frosties advertising hoardings. Characters have to 'consume' packets of Frosties to have enough power to take part in the races.

A related Frosties site offers children the chance to 'Earn their stripes' through playing online computer games introduced by the ubiquitous Tony the Tiger.

Other food brands using such techniques include the sugared milk drink Nesquik from Nestlé. Nesquik websites offer children a



Gr-r-r-reat prizes are on offer in Tony the Tiger's online Tigercathlon, where children can earn points by taking part in races in a virtual stadium, but only if their cartoon character picks up packets of Frosties to give them enough 'power'



Meet Wocky, Blumaroo, Grundo, Kiko, Tuskaninny, Uni and Usul

entertainment and marketing



Disney is investing heavily in its first venture into 'advergaming' – the use of website games that attract children but have inbuilt marketing messages. The advergaming site, due to launch this summer, will be Disney's 'Virtual Magic Kingdom'



range of games and downloads, from virtual sticker-collecting and trading games that incorporate branded imagery, to downloadable colouring sheets that encourage children to colour in the Nesquik rabbit holding his favourite sugary drink.

In all of these online advergaming, each image and interaction is meant to reinforce a sales message in the child's mind, linking the brands to excitement, involvement and fun, and flying under the radar of parental control.

- http://disneyland.disney.go.com/disneyland/en_US/special/vmk/index?VMKsplashPage
- <http://www.frosties.co.uk>
- <http://www.kelloggs.co.uk/frosties/games/tigercathlon/>
- <http://www.neopets.com>
- <http://www.nesquik.com>
- <http://www.nesquik.co.uk>



Two Nestlé websites promote the sugary drink Nesquik to young children. The online games use children's favourite activities such as sticker collecting and trading – complete with Nesquik branding.



– just some of the virtual 'Neopets' aiming to hook children into a long-term relationship with a website that interweaves games and marketing messages

That's McEntertainment!

Toys have long been used to promote food to children, with collectable toys routinely offered with children's fast food meals and sugared cereals. Over the years, the Food Commission has also been sent toys that promote branded food products.

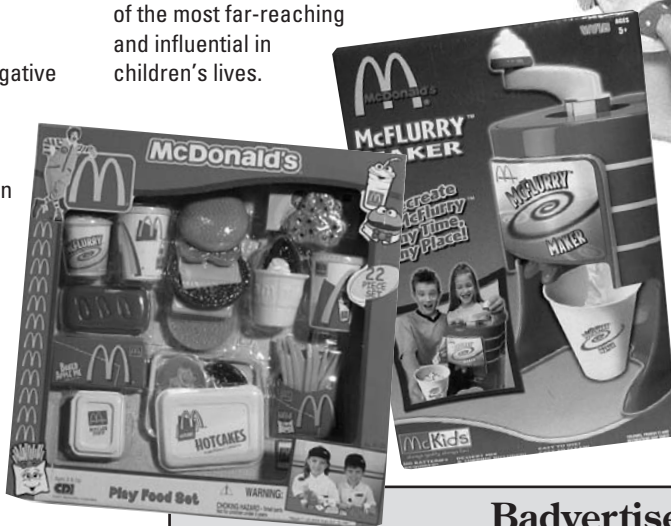
However, with increasingly negative media attention focused on TV advertising, we have noticed an increase in the use of different techniques to encourage children to interact with brands, and to advertise to themselves while they play.

Once again, in the case of food-branded toys, we ask the question: how can a child distinguish between a marketing message and entertainment when they have been interwoven to become one and the same thing?

In surveys of children's food advertising conducted over recent years, both in the UK and around the world, McDonald's has often been identified as 'the most prolific advertiser to children'. In his judgement on the famous McLibel trial in 1997, Justice Bell said that, 'McDonald's advertising is in large part directed at children, with a view to them pressuring or pestering

their parents to take them to McDonald's.'

Here we show just some of the examples of McDonald's branded toys. The food company is not the only one to use this technique, but it's brand is one of the most far-reaching and influential in children's lives.



As far as we're aware the McDonald's Barbie pictured above is only available in the US (where we've also spotted her moonlighting in a Pizza Hut restaurant playset), but there are a wide range of McDonald's toys available in the UK, such as the McFlurry Maker and the Play Food Set pictured left.

Badvertisement

Seriously un-fruity!

The pictures and descriptions on the front of these Fox's Glacier Cranberry Fusion sweets might make you think that they are jam-packed with fruit. Fox's emphasise that they are 'made with concentrated fruit juice', resulting in 'seriously juicy fruit flavours'.

So how much juice is in these sweets? The ingredients list declares 0.2% cranberry, 0.06% blackcurrant, 0.05% raspberry and a pitiful 0.04% apple – just over a third of one per cent concentrated fruit juice in total (0.35%). To give you some idea of how much that is, we've reproduced the packet at 0.35% size inside the circle underneath the full size image. The company is at pains to point out how healthy the



product is, advising that eating six sweets provides 40% of the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin C, and that 'a serving of this product will provide, on average, 5.2% of the recommended daily calorie intake for men and 6.5% for women'.

But Fox's is selective with the information they choose to provide. Funnily enough, one of the few pieces of information missing from the packet is the sugar

content – which we estimate to be around 90%. On this estimate, a single serving of six sweets would provide around 25g of sugar – nearly half of the recommended daily maximum for an adult woman. It's a shame that Fox's uses healthy descriptions to hype up what are, after all, just sweets.



McDonald's Cash Registers for McToddlers to play with, and McBackpacks filled with toy burgers and plastic chicken nuggets

photos by Hugh Warwick

Legal, decent, honest and true?

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) now has responsibility for adjudicating on complaints for broadcast as well as print advertising. In the past few months, it has been getting its teeth into some interesting rulings on food descriptions and nutritional claims, with far-reaching significance for food advertisers. Here we report on recent cases that touch on important themes.

X Water not fit for the job

A complaint was upheld against GlaxoSmithKline, for a poster and TV commercial promoting Lucozade Sport Hydro Active sugared and flavoured water. The poster carried the headline 'Water designed for exercise', featuring a runner and the phrase 'The fitness water from Lucozade Sport'. In the TV commercial, a voice-over stated, 'Imagine if water did more. Imagine if Lucozade Sport re-designed water for exercise and for better hydration than water alone.' The complainant objected that the use of the term 'water' misleadingly implied that the product was an 'unprocessed drink with zero calories'.

GlaxoSmithKline said that viewers would understand from the claim 'Imagine if Lucozade Sport re-designed water for exercise' that the product was water that had been 'formulated for exercise needs' with added sugar and sodium.

The ingredients in Lucozade Sport Hydro Active are water, glucose syrup, citric acid, acidity regulators, flavouring, sweeteners and added vitamins. Whilst acknowledging that the product was not high in calories, the ASA said that advertisements gave the overall impression that the product contained no calories or additives. Because they did, the Authority considered that the ads were misleading. It told GlaxoSmithKline to avoid that impression in future.



X Butter nonsense

Kerry Foods was rapped on the knuckles by the ASA for advertising a low-fat spread with the term 'Butter Pleasure' with the 'B' crossed out, and the phrase 'Rich creamy taste with a pure buttery melt.' The complainant objected that the ad was misleading, because it implied the advertised product was butter. The ASA agreed, and asked the advertisers to amend it with help from the Committee of Advertising Practice's Copy Advice team.

X Plain old tap water

Penta UK was criticised by the ASA for a host of claims relating to its 'ultra-purified, restructured micro-water'. Ground-breaking patented science, claimed Penta, showed that drinking one to four bottles a day would help your body to enjoy 'Bio-hydration – optimal cellular hydration that makes your body come alive'. The back page of the leaflet showed photographs of mustard seeds germinated in tap water beside impressively bigger seeds apparently germinated in Penta water, with the question: 'If it can do this for plants, just imagine what it can do for your body!!'

X Go ahead – eat sugar

The makers of Go Ahead products, United Biscuits McVitie's, were criticised by the ASA for magazine advertisements for cereal bars and cakes. One showed a slim woman doing yoga with an empty cake wrapper by her leg. The text said, 'Can't wait? Go ahead. When you need a snack, Go Ahead! is the healthier choice. Take these new mixed berry cereal bars. Using healthier ingredients means they contain only 2.2g fat per bar, so whenever you feel like it, feel free.'

Similar statements were made for Go Ahead! Oat Breaks. The complainant objected that, by focusing on the fat content alone, the adverts misleadingly implied the cereal bars and cakes were healthy snacks when they were also high in sugar. The advertisers argued that they were constrained by legislation that restricted the

The ASA judged that scientific evidence submitted by Penta did not prove the water had been restructured or that it could offer health benefits. It told the advertisers not to repeat claims that implied the product was chemically unique, had been restructured or molecularly redesigned, or hydrated cells and improved physical performance better than tap water.

X Sugary drinks are okay at bedtime

A complaint from the Food Commission was rejected by the ASA, relating to a bedtime drink for children called Snoozoo, manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline. The advert showed a mother leopard reading to her cub, with the cub holding a mug of Snoozoo. The ad stated, 'Get your little cub ready for bed', with a pack shot of 'Horlicks Snoozoo' showing the text 'With calcium'. Advertising rules specifically say that advertising to children cannot show them eating or drinking at bedtime. However, the ASA said that because the advert had been placed in Sainsbury's magazine, it was aimed at adults and therefore acceptable.

X Panda Pops not endorsed by NHS

A brochure for Panda Pops giving the impression that the children's drinks were endorsed by the National Health Service was criticised by the ASA. For a full report, see page 3.



use of artificial sweeteners in bakery products, and formulated products to contain sugars from natural ingredients such as dried fruit.

The ASA noted that the advertiser's products had lower fat contents than some other snacks, but comparable sugar content. The Authority therefore concluded that United Biscuits McVitie's had not shown that the products were healthier than other similar snack products and that the adverts were therefore misleading. The biscuit company was told not to use such an approach again.

Bits of old cow back on your plate – soon!

The government wants to end the rule banning cattle over 30 months old from entering our food supply. So, asks Tim Lobstein, we can all eat burgers again, can we?

Since 1996, when the government admitted that the cattle disease Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was likely to be the cause of a new form of human disease, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), animals aged over 30 months have been excluded from our food supply.

The cut-off point of 30-months was supposed to ensure that no diseased animal would get to the butcher's shop. There had been some resistance to bringing in the legislation, with farmers fearing that their older cattle would be worthless. Government agriculture officials worried that the ban would imply that their previous control measures – mainly the removal of specified risk material such as brain and spinal cord – had been inadequate – something they didn't want to admit.

The decision to go for a 30-month cut-off was based on expedience and administrative convenience. At about the age of 27 months cattle show new permanent incisor teeth erupting, and therefore the 30-month rule could be interpreted by a quick examination of an animal's mouth to check for 'not more than two new incisors'.

However, the government also argued that data from experimental studies of similar diseases in mice had shown that infectivity was first detected in the central nervous system approximately half way through the incubation period. The mean average age at which signs appear in cattle is approximately 60 months, therefore, they argued, 30 months should be a time at which infectivity is only just emerging. And, they added, the earliest appearance of signs in cattle following experimental feeding with infected material is about 32 to 33 months after giving the feed.

There are some big holes in these arguments. The main one concerns the finding of BSE in cattle under 30 months old. At least 80 cattle aged just 30 months or less are on the disease record, all of them

diagnosed during the peak of the BSE crisis between 1986 and 1996. This is a small number compared with the total falling victim to the disease, but it is enough to challenge the assumptions that 30-month beef is safe. Some of these animals were substantially younger – the youngest was just 21 months when the disease struck (see box, right).

Secondly, to argue that the average age when signs appear in cattle is 60 months implies that around half the cases of BSE have been found in animals younger than this age. Therefore, following the logic,

around half the animals would have infectivity in their nervous system before the half-way point, i.e. younger than 30 months.

And if the first signs of the disease appear in cattle within 32-33 months of giving tainted feed, then infectivity would be detectable about half-way through that period, i.e. about 15 months after giving feed. As one of the acknowledged sources of contamination may be the milk-replacer given to newborn calves, any animal from 15 months could, in theory, be carrying infectivity. Indeed, experimental studies showed infectivity in the intestines of cattle within six months of ingesting contaminated feed.

So the 30-month rule was a poorly-supported cut-off from a scientific point of view. But it did have one political advantage for the government. The EU brought in legislation requiring all cattle aged over 30 months to be tested for BSE before being allowed into the food chain. The UK, with its



"Now they're bringing us out of retirement, I wonder if we'll end up as specially matured prime rump steak or protein gloop in chicken nuggets?"

ban on such animals, had an automatic derogation: no such animals needed to be tested as no such animals were entering the food chain. (In fact a few rare breeds that need longer maturing were allowed to enter the food chain, and they had to be tested, but the principle remained – little testing had to be done.)

As a result of the derogation, throughout the period from 1996 to late 2000, very few older animals were checked for BSE status before being sent to the incinerator. The only BSE cases were those that had got so bad the farmer had to report them to a vet. Only in 2000 did the EU insist that all countries, even the UK, had to check their herds for BSE by testing a selection of older cattle, whether or not they went into the food supply. Gradually, the UK started examining older beasts, and found BSE was

running at levels that were still among the worst of any country in Europe (see second box, right).

Therefore, age is an unreliable guide to safety, and 30 months a meaningless threshold. In Germany and France tests are carried out on all animals over 24 months entering the food supply, and in Japan at present all cattle entering the food supply are tested for BSE, whatever their age.

The government's second argument in favour of lifting the ban on older animals is that the high risk material – brain, spinal cord and certain offals – are removed from all animals, so that even if they were harbouring BSE we would not be exposed to infective material. This claim has been somewhat damaged by the repeated evidence that slaughterhouses and their inspectors have missed large fragments of cord and other offal attached to carcasses. (In the latest case from Scotland the Food Standards Agency admitted it had not made an announcement when they realised a contaminated carcass had been sold because 'the meat had already been eaten'.)

Besides the incompetence of the meat inspection system, recent research has shown that potentially infective abnormal prions, the carrier of the disease, can be detected in other tissue, such as muscle and lymph nodes, and tend to accumulate where there is inflammation. In sheep and goats, the intestines and other organs are deemed potentially infective and must be removed.

A third argument the government is using to 'beef up' its case for lifting the ban is that only animals born after the controls on animal feedstuffs introduced in 1996 will be allowed back into the food supply. The controls were designed to prevent any mammalian tissue getting into ruminant feeds, and made strict orders to prevent cross-contamination between cattle feed

and feed for chicken, pets, etc, to limit the possibility of BSE being recycled to cattle. In theory, no animal born after July 1996 would be exposed to contaminated feedstuffs, and so should not develop the disease.

As if! By March this year over 110 cases of BSE had been reported in these 'born after the ban' animals. In hardly any of these cases was the mother a victim of BSE either during or after the pregnancy – although some mothers were slaughtered before the disease might have developed. The most likely explanation is that contaminated feed continued to circulate around the system, and, with the latest case in an animal born as recently as October 2001, it is quite possible that contaminated feed is still around.

The 30-month scheme has always been a bit of a diversion. The Japanese approach is likely to be the better alternative, provided that it works – i.e. that there are rugged, reliable testing schemes in place and that every animal entering the food supply is tested. The German/French threshold of every animal over 24 months old is a weak compromise, but would still ensure that a large proportion of meat has been checked before it heads off to the supermarket or the school canteen.

N.B. As we pointed out in a recent *Food Magazine*, although it is now legally required for the labels of meat products to declare the presence of mechanically recovered meat, there is no requirement to declare the presence of meaty goo derived from other methods for stripping the scraps of connective tissue, gristle and flesh from the bones of animals including – when the rules are changed – older cows whose meat traditionally goes to burgers, sausages, stews and soup.

Age in months of the youngest cases of BSE in Britain*

Year	Age of youngest case (in months)
1986	30
1987	30
1988	24
1989	21
1990	24 (2 cases)
1991	24
1992	20
1993	29
1994	30 (2 cases)
1995	24
1996	29
1997	37 (7 cases)
1998	34
1999	39 (2 cases)
2000	40
2001	48
2002	51
2003	50
2004	70
2005	39

Source: DEFRA

* Other countries have also found BSE in cattle aged under 30 months. A case of BSE in an animal just 21 months old was reported in Japan last year.

Time for more tests?

The UK has been testing very few animals compared with our close European neighbours – and we still find more BSE cases than we would like to.

Tests on healthy animals: latest results January-October 2004

Country	Tests on healthy cattle	Positive cases	Cases per million tests
France	2,191,270	17	8
Germany	1,850,157	29	16
Ireland	437,719	17	39
Netherlands	376,667	4	0.1
UK	236,441	9	38
Total EU-25	7,752,107	143	18

Source: European Commission

Continued from front page

Allotment power

Redbridge is a suburb in North East London with a population of 240,000 people, over a third of whom are from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds. As in many urban areas, green space is of great importance to the local population, providing opportunities for physical exercise and leisure use.

Through Forest Farm, refugees and asylum seekers are given a chance to grow their own fruit and vegetables, practice English, broaden skills, meet other people, and receive one-to-one support. At the same time, members give back to the community by improving the quality of the environment and increasing the availability of local organic food.

To date members have worked together to grow onions, carrots, spinach, rocket, beet, chard, cabbage, garlic, peas, broadbeans, pumpkins, rhubarb, squash and the occasional artichoke. From deserted plots, members salvaged a lot of raspberries, blackcurrants, redcurrants, and gooseberries, along with some plum and damson trees and grapevines.

In the future Forest Farm may also offer a therapeutic service for those suffering from post traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. The people who come to the project are aged from 4 to 65 years old, including a group of boys age 7 to 17 from Kenya who are in a church group and come together to work on the allotment.

All of Forest Farm's members have experienced war, torture or persecution. As the work grows, the project hopes members will be able to work with a therapist at their plot, using the garden as a space for reflection and healing. For now, the focus is on letting the gardening and companionship do the work.

In the year since its inception, Forest Farm Peace Garden has attracted nearly 50

refugees and asylum seekers, of whom around 15 are regular and returning members. As winter now ends and new recruitment materials go to press, last year's members are returning to their plots to harvest onions, lay down manure, sow the new year's seeds, and enjoy the change of weather. Travelling anything from 45 minutes to two hours each way, people originally from Iran, Turkey, Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Congo, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Burundi and Kenya come once every week or two to spend a day at the garden, where they work their plots, practice English and share tea and lunch.

For members, the project offers a space away from city noise, where they can occupy themselves with practical, meaningful and creative activity, while being part of a community. Having space to shape as their own brings a welcome sense of normality as well as the opportunity to enjoy exercise, fresh air and companionship.

Behind clanging gates, scattered remnants of fly tipping and the unkempt banks of the Central Line, Forest Farm Peace Garden is still in its infancy. However, its first year has been remarkable, and the year ahead promises the same. There is hope that the project's momentum will encourage other community projects to use the 10-acre allotment for local organic food and community building.

■ **Forest Farm Peace Garden is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organisation with charitable aims. It is currently seeking a treasurer, two management committee members and gardening volunteers. To get involved or make a donation, please contact project manager Joanna Burch Brown on 020 8989 4204; email fpg2004@yahoo.co.uk**

At Forest Farm Peace Garden, asylum seekers experience companionship in the allotment's tranquil surroundings after experiences of war and violence in their home countries.



ActionAid calls for Tesco trade justice

In the week that Tesco received positive coverage in the media for pre-tax profits of £2.03bn, the development charity ActionAid highlighted the poverty experienced by many women workers who supply the giant supermarket chain with food.

Compare, for instance, the salary of Tesco Chief Executive Terry Leahy – £2.98m (including a bonus of £1.9m) – to the yearly income of £825 received by a fruit-farm worker in South Africa. 'This is not the minimum wage. I can't afford school fees for my daughter,' says farm worker Tawana Fraser.

In a report called *Rotten Fruit: Tesco profits as women workers pay a high price*, ActionAid catalogues the experiences of South African farm workers whose produce looks so pristine on Tesco shelves.

'The retailer is known to squeeze local suppliers,' says the report, 'and these pressures are passed on in the form of low wages and precarious employment for the most vulnerable in the supply chain: casual women farm workers.'

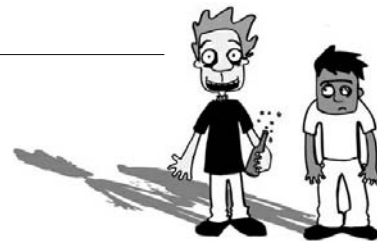
As well as poverty wages, ActionAid says that the farm workers often have no protective clothing when pesticides are sprayed in the orchards. 'We have to pick pears from trees while they're still wet from pesticides,' explained one worker.

Many women also reported gender discrimination, with male workers receiving equipment and protective clothing while female workers were left to fend for themselves. ActionAid says that it is not calling for a boycott of South African fruit from Tesco as this would prove counterproductive. However, the group is calling for the adoption of new standards at the United Nations to establish legal obligations for transnational companies to respect and secure the human rights of all workers within a company's sphere of influence.

Whilst welcoming Tesco's commitment to improve their social and environmental performance, ActionAid says, 'We believe the voluntary approach to be insufficient and needs to be underpinned by minimum legal standards applied at the national and international levels'. The report points out that 'All countries have an obligation to ensure that Transnational Companies do not undermine human rights when they invest overseas.'

■ **For details of the report and campaigns, contact: mail@actionaid.org.uk, call: 020 7561 7561 or visit: www.actionaid.org.uk**

■ **For campaign activities to support the Trade Justice Movement, see: www.tjm.org.uk**



What should children know about food?

Education, education, education is the theme of the government's approach to improving the nation's diets and reducing diet-related diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer and obesity.

The Food Commission welcomes approaches to diet and health that aim to give children the skills and understanding to improve their own health. We have long been supporters of schemes such as Grab 5! (www.grab5.com) that encourage children to taste and enjoy fruit and veg. We support the reintroduction of cooking skills into the National Curriculum, action to improve school meals, and a curb on the marketing of unhealthy food to children (see Children's Food Bill News, page 3).

However, we have become increasingly concerned that educational

materials provided to children are sponsored by food companies or devised by food industry funded groups. Some of these materials portray questionable products in a highly favourable light and downplay unhealthy ingredients.

Even where educational materials give sensible, non-commercial advice, the actual food choices advertised to children, and available in shops and vending machines, bear little resemblance to the 'balanced diet' which children are encouraged to follow.

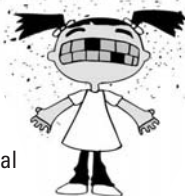
The Food Commission is therefore planning to launch a Children's Food Website to encourage children to question the food environment in which they are growing up.

The website will also explain many of the promotional techniques used

by food companies to target consumers. We can't hope to compete with the well-funded nutrition messages put out by the food industry, but we can encourage children to think about the food they eat and the marketing techniques that sell such foods.

But we need your help. What do you think young people (especially young teenagers) need to know about the food they eat? A questionnaire is enclosed with this *Food Magazine*. We would be pleased to hear from teenagers, parents or professionals (especially teachers).

We would value your opinions and ideas, and your help to ensure that children become armed with the information they need to make healthier choices. You can return the form (or simply write) to The Food Commission, Freepost KE 7564, London N1 9BR or email munch@foodcomm.org.uk



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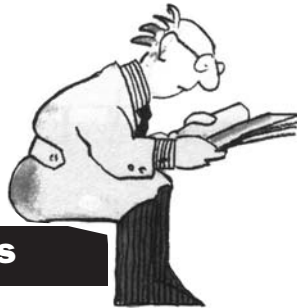
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What the doctor reads

The latest research from the medical journals

Increased diabetes risk from waist size

Having a large waist is a strong predictor of diabetes risks, and is more accurate than body weight or Body Mass Index (BMI), according to a study that tracked over 27,000 men for more than a decade. Those men with a waist of 34-36 inches were twice as likely to develop diabetes than those with a smaller waist, while men with waists of 36-38 inches, 38-40 inches, and over 40 inches were 3, 5 and 12 times as likely to develop diabetes.

The researchers suggest that abdominal fat mass is the key, and that measures of body weight can be confounded by the size of muscles and by fat deposited on less risky sites. Present US recommendations for healthy waist sizes suggest that above 40 is risky, but this cut-off point should now be revised downwards, say the authors.

■ Wang Y, et al, 2005, *Am J Clin Nutr* 81:555-563.

Yogurt linked to sweeter breath

A report by Japanese researchers suggests that people regularly eating plain yogurt, without added sugars, had a reduced quantity of compounds in the mouth that lead to bad breath. Volunteers were instructed on oral hygiene and avoided yogurts and related foods for two weeks, then ate 90g plain yogurt every day for six weeks. Tests showed that the levels of hydrogen sulphide (a major cause of halitosis) fell by up to 80%.

■ Internat Assoc for Dental Research conference 10.03.05 and BDHA news release 16.03.05.

Dogs benefit from extra anti-oxidants

Tests of cognitive behaviour, such as recognition and memory, in groups of elderly beagles have shown that adding anti-oxidants to their diet slows the normal decline with age. The decline was also slowed by making the dogs' environments richer and more interactive, and the two effects could be combined to give the best test results of all. (NB The research was run by a pet food company.)

■ Zicker SC, 2005, *Progress in Neuropsychopharmacol Psych* 29:455-459.

Poor diets linked to poverty in 11-year-olds

A study of over 2000 11-year-old schoolchildren in Glasgow has found that the strongest predictor of poor dietary habits and frequent snacking was lower social class. There was little difference in dietary behaviour resulting from meal patterns or family size. No matter what the social class, diets were worse in families where the mother was not full-time at home, either because of employment or illness, but these effects were small compared with social class differences. Boys were especially affected by deprivation.

■ Sweeting H and West P, 2005, *J Hum Nutr Diet* 18:93-97.

New support for red wine

A review from Yale medical school confirms earlier reports that moderate quantities of red wine are good for the heart. The researchers suggested two combined mechanisms, the first which showed a benefit from consuming small amounts of alcohol on a daily basis – up to two and three ounces of alcohol before a negative effect was demonstrated – but also an additional benefit from red wine even if the alcohol is

removed. The probable source of this benefit are the antioxidant polyphenols found in many fruit, particularly berries, as well as green tea and cocoa beans.

Polyphenols serve to reduce the build-up of plaque in blood vessels and reduce the risk of clots forming in circulating blood.

■ Cordova AC et al, 2005, *J Amer Coll Surgeons* 200:428-439.

Product requests linked to eating with TV on

A survey of over 500 ten-year-old French-Canadian children found that a fifth of girls and a quarter of boys consumed food in front of the television daily, and that among boys there was a strong positive link between the frequency of eating in front of the TV and the children's requests to parents for advertised foods.

Frequent TV eaters also gave importance to a food's appearance, and generally had a poorer diet than those who were not frequent TV eaters.

The researchers emphasise the need to consider children's eating environments when giving advice about improving their diets.

■ Marquis M et al, 2005, *Can J Diet Pract Res* 66:12-18.

Migrants suffer dietary decline

The nutritional status of immigrants can often be affected by the culture in which they find themselves, especially if their traditional cuisine is not well supported in their new country of residence.

A study of the diets of pregnant Mexican women living in the US found that their diets were poorer the longer they had lived there, with the worst diets among those that had been born in the USA.

The difference was especially marked for micronutrients, with intakes of several vitamins (A, C, E and folate) and minerals (calcium and zinc) declining significantly among women born in the US. Many of the women showed significant dietary deficiency in iron, zinc, folate and vitamin E, with the worst deficiencies among those born in the US.

■ Harley K et al, 2005, *Paed Perinat Epid* 19:125-134.

A study of 2000 schoolchildren in Aachen, Germany, has shown that those from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be overweight, but that this may be explained by dietary habits rather than genetic differences. A quarter of the children were from non-German origins but among these children the prevalence of overweight was twice as high as among German children (15% vs. 7%). Prevalence of most known risk factors for overweight, such as low physical activity, high consumption of soft drinks, and frequent visits to fast-food restaurants was also higher among non-German children, and was also linked to the mothers' education and the amount of TV watching. The authors suggest that, in preventing obesity among children, there is the need to identify and deal with high risk environments rather than high risk ethnic groups.

■ Kuepper-Nybelin J et al, 2005, *Arch Dis Child* 90:359-363.

Can omega-3 help prevent obesity?

This spring the food industry received approval for a new health claim linking omega-3 to healthy hearts. Could they also add anti-obesity claims for this ingredient?

This spring the Joint Health Claims Initiative – a body comprised of consumer, trading standard and industry representatives – agreed that foods containing omega-3 fatty acids could make a health claim along the following lines: *'Eating 3g weekly, or 0.45g daily, long-chain omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids, as part of a healthy lifestyle, helps maintain heart health.'*

The omega-3 fatty acids come in short and long-chain form. The short-chain forms are found in vegetable oils, and are usually less than 50% of the total polyunsaturated fatty acids, with the rest made up of omega-6 fatty acids and monounsaturated fatty acids. Canola (rapeseed) and linseed oils have more than half the polyunsaturated fatty acids in the form of omega-3s. The long-chain omega-3s are found primarily in fish oils. We can convert short-chain omega-3s into longer forms but the process is not efficient, and the consumption of long-chain omega-3s from fish in the diet is recommended for heart health.

Omega-3s also appear to have other benefits, including psychological functioning, and, according to recent research, they may be less obesogenic than other forms of fat and oil. Indeed, for some years, researchers have been suggesting that omega-3 oils may protect against obesity, while omega-6s may encourage obesity, and that the ratio between the two may be a crucial element in bodyweight control.

Further evidence is unfolding every few months, and here we give a round-up of recent papers on the subject.

- Mice fed a diet rich in omega-3s gained less weight than mice fed a diet with the same total amount of fat but not in the form of omega-3. The total number of fat cells and the

average size of each fat cell were both less following the omega 3-rich diet. Long-chain omega-3s (e.g. from fish) were most effective, and the addition of shorter chain omega-3s (e.g. from vegetable oils) reduced but did not eliminate the effect. (Ruzickova *et al*, *Lipids*, 39, 2004)

- In rats, omega-3 deficiency during infancy led to later metabolic problems. The offspring of mothers that had been fed a diet low in omega-3s were likely to develop poor glucose control in adulthood, regardless of their own diet as they grew up. If those offspring were allowed access to omega-3-rich diets, they ate more, put on more weight and had more body fat than rats not allowed access to omega-3s. (Jayasooriya *et al*, *A P J Clin Nutrition*, 13 (S), 2004)
- Mice with fatty liver disease (common in obesity) developed healthy livers when fed a diet in which the oils were exclusively

omega-3s. (Alwayn *et al*, *Transplantation*, 79, 2005)

- A review of previous research concluded that fatty acids and their derivatives can have hormone-like effects and have been shown to regulate gene expression in fat cells as the cells form. Fatty acids from fish oil reduce fat cell proliferation and reduce adiposity (the proportion of bodyweight that is fatty tissue) in rodents, but there is still little direct evidence of the ability of fatty acids to manipulate fat cell development in other species. (Azain, *J Animal Science*, 82, 2004)
- A second review suggested that the levels of child obesity being found in developed economies is not linked to total fat intake, as this has changed little in the last few decades, but to the relative amount of omega-6 fatty acids, which has increased significantly. This may be particularly important in early infancy, when the composition of formula bottle feeds may be high in omega-6s, and mothers' milk may also be high in omega-6 if her own diet is contains a high proportion of this form of fat. (Ailhaud *et al*, *Obesity Reviews*, 5, 2004)
- A study of the fat content of subcutaneous cells sampled from nearly 100 children in Crete and Cyprus found that the type of fatty acid that was most strongly associated with overweight and obesity was arachidonic acid, an omega-6 fatty acid. (Savva *et al*, *Br J Nutr*, 91, 2004)
- A strain of mice that easily gain weight were given a 25% fat diet, of which the fat was either lard, safflower oil (omega-6) or fish oil (omega-3). The fish oil group gained the least weight and the lard group the most weight. A group fed with only 5% fat in their diet (from soy oil) gained even less weight than the fish oil group. The fish oil group had the healthiest insulin responsiveness and glucose tolerance. (Steerenberg *et al*, *Diabetes Nutr Metab*, 15, 2002)



"I personally recommend lab-mice fed on omega-3 fatty acids. They help me keep slim and they have a great fishy aftertaste!"

- When mother mice were fed with a diet rich in either omega-6 or a blend of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids during pregnancy and lactation, the body weight of her offspring at weaning, as well as their total fat mass, and the average size of fat cells at eight weeks of age, were all higher in the omega-6 group compared with the blended fatty acid group. (Massiera *et al*, *J Lipid Res*, 44, 2003)

feedback

letters from our readers



We welcome letters from all of our readers but we do

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

Earthworms make us healthy

In your last issue, Tim Lobstein surveyed losses of nutrients, minerals and trace minerals in fruit and vegetables over 30 years, and as an example he mentions iodine in China. But we have a much closer example in Europe. Among other trace minerals, zinc and selenium are deficient in our soils, wheat and bread and their loss is closely linked to prostate cancer. Organic farming of soils over at least five years will improve levels of micro-organisms and earthworms. Earthworm casts contain many trace minerals ingested and liberated from subsoil and plant particles and made available to crops. See *'The Living Soil'* by Eve Balfour, pages 104-106 where she explores the role of earthworms, mycelia and mycorrhiza in crop nutrition and health.

Liz Walker, Brighton

Same pots: Different weights

My 12-year-old daughter pointed out something about Yeo Valley yogurts that I found very surprising. She was delighted when I couldn't guess what was different about the two pots, apart from the obvious difference in flavours. They're the same size, have very similar descriptions, and they're both organic. I did pay about 20p more for the blackcurrant variety, but I thought that reasonable for the extra taste. However, what my daughter spotted is that they actually contain a different amount of yogurt. I paid my extra 20p more for 10% less yogurt! The blackcurrant variety contains 450g, the natural variety contains 500g.

Gill Lewers, Hereford



Chocolate good for digestion?

I came across this chocolate bar in Waitrose and thought you might find the claims on the wrapping interesting. It is stated that the product 'reduces your intake of calories'. Perhaps there is some way that it is less calorific than standard chocolate, but this seems to imply that eating this bar of chocolate will make you slimmer than not eating it, and I certainly find this hard to swallow! I would be interested to know more about the science behind the claim.

Carolyn Scott, Cradley, Worcestershire

Eds: We're not sure that you should waste any of your chocolatey energy seeking out the science behind this nonsense. The manufacturer implies that a fibrous cactus extract ingredient will 'help you eliminate fat and speed your digestion in the most pleasant way'. But this is hardly likely to eliminate the effects of 29 per cent sugar, 23 per cent saturated fat and over 500 kcalories per 100g. At 73% cocoa solids, it sounds like a nice bar of chocolate, but that's simply what it is and should be treated as such - i.e. in moderation!



Fiji is not local!

I am very concerned about the effects our food system has on the environment - especially food miles. When I read your recent story about bottled water being transported halfway across the planet, I thought how stupid we are to use carbon fuels in this way, especially for water which is so readily available in our own country.

I saw the Fiji water you featured in the article on sale in Fresh & Wild, where I shop because of the eco-credentials of its products. I was bemused to see the mismatch between this water that has travelled thousands of miles and the eco-friendly description on Fresh & Wild's paper bags. I have suggested to the shop that they adopt a more joined-up policy and I enclose a sample bag for your collection.

Ella Morton, Camden, North London



Our article on egg labelling in FM68 provoked a flurry of letters, some of which are published here.

State 'caged hens' clearly!

While 'free range' is printed loud and clear on the eggs qualifying for that description, Columbus Eggs are extremely shy about the eggs from caged hens. As I understand it, the EU Directive which came into force in January 2004 states that all eggs produced in the battery system must be clearly labelled as 'eggs from caged hens'.

Certainly all the other eggs I have found in Morrisons produced this way, and in other major supermarkets, are now labelled as such.

The Columbus eggs carry only the tiniest little area on the front of the box to indicate the method of production. More, one has to match the method to a list A, B, C, etc. Apart from the brainwork necessary, an optician has told me that in artificial light you would need above average vision to read this label.

Mrs Rosemary Marshall, East Claydon, Buckinghamshire

Mrs Marshall enclosed a letter from correspondence with Buckinghamshire County Council trading standards on this issue explaining that 'Although the EU Regulation is in force, the industry is currently being consulted prior to a Statutory Instrument being enacted and therefore made law in the UK. This means that at the moment [egg companies] are not obliged to state on the front of the box the eggs are from caged hens. A Statutory Instrument will be enacted and come into force within the next six months.'

Eggrieved!

Your article 'Scrambled Labels' did little to clarify issues relating to egg labelling because it seemed more interested in criticising the egg sector in general and Deans Foods in particular.

The article pointed out that the minimum weight printed on the pack of Woodland Organic eggs equated to 54.7g per egg or the lower end of Medium. Regulations and the nature of egg grading machines do not allow us to pack an average weight so we are forced to use a minimum weight. As there is a legal obligation not to fall below this we have to cater for the conceivable worst case of six low-end Medium eggs ending up in the same pack.

Except in very rare circumstances, consumers show no sign of objecting to mixed weight packing and as your article shows, it is widely used.

The name Woodland Free Range was coined by one of our independent free range producers who planted his farm with trees to provide a more natural environment for the hens and encourage them to spend more time in the open air. He was very impressed by the results and suggested to Deans that we develop a brand. Having launched the brand we thought a tie-up with the Woodland Trust would be beneficial for both parties – since signing our agreement, Deans has contributed £34,000 to a worthwhile charity which we are proud to support.

Your allegations that Columbus Eggs provide little more Omega-3 than the oil they are cooked in might be true of cooks using Flaxseed oil but Soya or Rapeseed oils contain only 7% Omega-3 and Corn and Sunflower none.

Columbus eggs are produced by both free-range and caged hens. The free-range packs are clearly marked 'Free Range', the cage packs 'Fresh' and they used to carry the words 'eggs from caged hens'. However, we sometimes pack off surplus free-range eggs into the 'Fresh' packs and the new labelling regulations prohibited us from retaining the 'eggs from caged hens' statement. Defra's lawyers ruled that it might mislead consumers!

Duck eggs fall outside the EU and UK labelling regulations which only apply to hen eggs. They do not, therefore, have to be weight graded or ink jet printed. What the consumer gets is what it says on the pack – Duck Eggs. A little research on your part or even a phone call to Deans might have revealed this information, but it appears to be a lower priority than thinking up egg puns.

Peter Challands
Marketing Director, Deans Foods

Trans fat to go

In your January/March issue you answered a query about trans fats. I have experience in food processing and can offer a more full explanation.

Trans fats occur as a result of the hydrogenation of natural oils. The particular trans fats that are a health concern are not the same as those in butter and occur in much larger amounts – comparisons to butter originate with the oil hydrogenation industry. In fact more research is emerging that some of the trans fat in butter – conjugated linoleic acid – has a positive impact on health.

Trans fats raise LDL cholesterol and lower HDL cholesterol, thereby distorting the ratio of LDL to HDL above the optimum level of 2:1. The Interheart survey, published in *The Lancet* last October and described as 'the most robust study ever conducted on heart attack risk factors' ranked an abnormal LDL/HDL cholesterol ratio with tobacco consumption as a leading heart attack risk factor.

Most hydrogenated fat will continue to be unlabelled as its main use is in bakery products, fast food and fried foods. The

catering industry have no requirement to label trans fats and are responsible for up to half the total consumed.

In 1993, when *The Food Magazine* accepted advertising [the magazine was co-published with the Soil Association's *Living Earth* magazine at the time], I paid for a back cover advertisement (for Whole Earth Foods Super Spread) that highlighted the dangers of trans fats. Unilever, makers of Flora, complained to the Advertising Standards Authority and we were gagged. Nonetheless, over the next six months, Flora reduced their hydrogenated oil content from 21% to less than 1%. Jenny Wolfe of the FSA recently wrote that the average daily intake of trans fats 'has been reduced since hydrogenated vegetable oils were reduced in many UK margarines.' I still take pleasure in the fact that just one banned advertisement forced a significant reduction in the nation's trans fat consumption that might otherwise have been delayed for years.

Craig Sams, Hastings, www.craigsams.com

Happy chickens?

Reader Wendy Battle from Enfield sent us this box that contained 'Country Fresh Eggs', carrying a picture of a hen sitting on five eggs in a bed of straw.

Mrs Battle pointed out that the phrase 'Eggs from caged hens' does appear on the box, but only in tiny letters on the back. 'It doesn't seem right that they can portray a happy maternal hen on a comfortable nest. As far as I know, caged hens live on wire mesh without straw and cannot move about comfortably.'



For the record

Turkey Twizzlers have been much in the news, thanks to the *Guardian* and to Jamie's school meals campaign. For *Food Magazine* readers who don't usually look at products like these, here are the details.

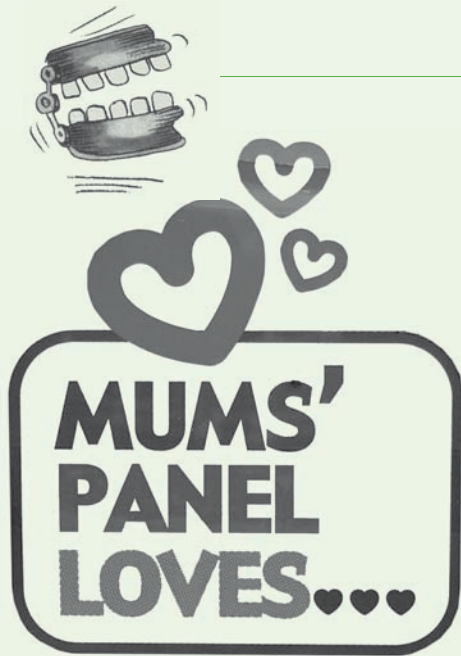
The meat in Turkey Twizzlers comes from 'turkey (34%)', plus pork fat and turkey skin. The total fat content after cooking is 21%. The salt content is unstated but salt appears twice in the ingredients list, as does rusk which itself may contain salt. There's also the sweetener aspartame, hydrogenated fat and... well, feel free to read the list yourself.

Incidentally, Twizzlers are supposed to be cooked from frozen. We foolishly allowed a

packet to defrost and discovered a slick of thick, coloured oil escaping from the packet. We still haven't got the stain off the desk!



INGREDIENTS: Turkey (34%), Water, Pork Fat, Rusk, Coating (Sugar, Rusk, Tomato Powder, Wheat Starch, Dextrose, Salt, Wheat Flour, Potassium Chloride, Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil, Citric Acid, Spices, Onion Powder, Malt Extract, Smoke Flavouring, Garlic Powder, Colour (E160c), Mustard Flour, Permitted Sweetener (E951), Herb, Spice Extracts, Herb Extracts), Vegetable Oil, Turkey Skin, Salt, Wheat Flour, Dextrose, Stabiliser (E450), Mustard, Yeast Extract, Antioxidants (E304, E307, E330, E300), Herb Extract, Spice Extract, Colour (E162). CONTAINS A SOURCE OF PHENYLALANINE. ALTHOUGH GREAT CARE HAS BEEN TAKEN TO REMOVE ALL BONES, SOME MAY REMAIN.



McMum's panel

It is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Perhaps the Food Commission should be flattered, then, that McDonald's has adopted a Parents' Jury style approach to its latest promotions of children's Happy Meals.

The Parents' Jury is the Food Commission's campaign allowing parents to voice their opinions about children's food. Presumably McDonald's Mums will come to a more flattering conclusion than members of the Parents' Jury which, in 2002, gave McDonald's the Pester Power award for manipulative advertising or marketing techniques.

GM release in Food Commission office!

We have some historic items in our food museum – packaging and products that constantly remind us of the excesses of marketing claims and how food watchdogs must remain ever vigilant.

One treasured item is a small can of Sainsbury's tomato purée that proudly announces on the front that it is 'Made with genetically modified tomatoes' and that 'The benefits of using genetically modified tomatoes for this product are less waste and reduced energy in processing.'

Of course, such claims would be a sure-fire way of guaranteeing product failure these days, but this product has a sell-by date of 1999. We bought it before the storm of bad publicity that saw GM products removed from supermarket shelves.

Last month, one of our researchers picked up the can and found, to her horror, that ancient GM tomato paste had started to seep through the can's seam at the back. Quite apart from concern that we might be releasing some horrific new organism to the environment, we think the tomatoes may have developed a sense of humour in their time in the can.

The tractor returns!

The Little Red Tractor logo was relaunched last month to give assurance to consumers that they are buying food grown to high safety, environmental and animal-welfare standards. This time, it has an added Union Jack flag to give further assurance that the products come from British farms.

The scheme was criticised in the past for requiring farmers to do little more than follow the law yet the new Little Red Tractor leaflets and website give no indication that the situation is different this time around. Let's hope that the re-launch really does signal a move towards better safety, environmental and animal protection. Otherwise, we fear that the logo will show the same properties as this tractor toy, circulated as a promotional gift at the first launch of the Little Red Tractor. As soon as we took it out of the packet to examine it, the rear wheels fell off.



John's secret

So it is farewell to Sir John Krebs, who is quitting an £80,000-a-year, 3-day-week job as the chair of the Food Standards Agency to return to his native Oxford, where they want him to be Principal of Jesus College.

Among the many things that we will remember him for is his insistence that there was no evidence to say that organic food is better than non-organic food.

So what a surprise to find that Sir John, at his farewell party (held, oddly, in the library of the Royal Institution at a cost of over £2,000), coyly admitted that, as a special treat for himself and Lady Krebs on Valentine's Day, he bought two of Oxford's finest beef steaks – both of them certified organic!

FSAs on her CV

Sir John's replacement at the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is Deirdre Hutton, known in the consumer agency world for her role as chair of the National Consumer Council and known to industry for her role as a member of the Better Regulation Task Force.

But a brief dip into her CV shows she is also Deputy Chair of the Financial Service Authority (FSA) and Deputy Chair of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

She presumably has her sights on the Football Supporters Association, the Farm Service Agency, the Fluid Sealant Association...

War of words

Be careful what you say lest you find yourself in court being prosecuted by Nestlé, owners of Kit Kat.

The company is expected to secure trademark rights over the phrase 'have a break' which would mean anyone using the phrase could be breaking the intellectual copyright laws protecting Nestlé's property.

Mars has bitterly opposed the application claiming that the words lack sufficient distinctive character, but a preliminary ruling from the European Court of Justice has recommended that, if evidence from focus groups shows that people associate the phrase with the chocolate bar, then Nestlé will win their case.

A search of the internet found 213,000 websites using the phrase 'have a break', which should keep the lawyers busy. And here is our contribution: have a break, have a break, have a break, have a break, have a break, have a break...

