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Agency organises public debate on promotion of foods and children

The Food Standards Agency has organised a public debate to discuss the issue of food promotion to children and the effect it has on children's diets and rising levels of childhood obesity.

The debate, entitled 'Defusing the diet timebomb' and featuring a panel of informed and lively speakers, was due to take place in London at the QE2 Conference Centre, Westminster, on Tuesday 27 January from 6.30 to 8.00pm, as *FSA News* went to press.

The event was set to be chaired by broadcaster Jeremy Vine.

The panellists, chosen for their wide-ranging backgrounds and interests were: student and youth activist Kierra Box; Director General of the Advertising Association Andrew Brown; Head of Nutrition and Health Research at the Medical Research Council Dr Susan Jebb; broadcaster and commentator Richard D. North; business writer and consultant Richard Reeves; and celebrity chef Antony Worrall Thompson.

In September 2003, the Food Standards Agency published an independent, peer-reviewed, research project, *Does Food Promotion Influence Children? A Systematic Review of the Evidence*, led by Professor Gerard Hastings from Strathclyde University.

The review concluded that food promotion to children does have an effect on their food choices and behaviour.

Following the research, the Agency published a policy options paper, entitled *Promotional Activity and Children's Diets*, that laid out a range of policy options, including measures that could cover sponsorship, advertising, labelling, endorsements, in-store activity and loyalty schemes.

The intention of the paper was to encourage wide-ranging public debate that will help inform the Food Standards Agency's recommendations to Government.



Eating habits are often established at an early age

On its publication, Food Standards Agency Chair Sir John Krebs said: 'We already know that many children's diets contain more fat, sugar and salt than is recommended. We know that the level of obesity in children is rising and, in the words of the Chief Medical Officer, is a health timebomb that could explode.'

This is why the Agency is encouraging a wide debate on the options for action that could make a difference.

The debate on 27 January is one of the key activities planned by the Agency to engage a wide audience in discussing the issue. It was planned that members of the public could watch it live on Sky digital channel 687 or view the live webcast on the Agency's website.

Further information

More information on food promotion and children is on the Food Standards Agency website at: www.food.gov.uk/promotion/

See the special *FSA News* pull-out supplement inside on Defusing the diet timebomb: the promotion of foods and children.

'No new safety concerns over consuming farmed salmon'

On 8 January 2004 the US magazine *Science* published a study claiming that Scottish farmed salmon contained dangerous levels of dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which are potentially cancer-causing.

The Food Standards Agency issued a statement saying that the levels of dioxins and PCBs found in this study were in line with those that had previously been found by the FSA and were within up-to-date safety levels set by the World Health Organization and the European Commission.

The study did not raise any new food safety concerns, the Agency said, and

its advice applied to all salmon: farmed as well as wild, Scottish and imported.

FSA Chair Sir John Krebs said: 'This study shows that the levels of dioxins and PCBs in salmon are within internationally recognised safety limits and confirms previous studies undertaken by the Food Standards Agency.



'Our advice is that people should consume at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily, like salmon.'

'There is good evidence that eating oily fish reduces the risk of death from recurrent heart attacks and that there is a similar effect in relation to first heart attacks.'

'Although dioxin levels have decreased dramatically over the past two decades we recognise that they remain a consumer concern.

'We advise that the known benefits of eating one portion of oily fish a week outweigh any possible risks.

'Last year we asked a group of experts to advise on the balance of risks and benefits of eating more than this regularly over a lifetime and they will report later this year.'

On average, people in the UK eat one-quarter of a portion of oily fish a week.

Further information

Information on the science of assessing the risk from dioxins in food is available on the FSA website at www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/sciencerriskdioxins

More about the expert group that advises the FSA can be found at:

www.sacn.gov.uk/fish.htm

Answers to commonly asked questions on dioxins and PCBs in salmon and other oily fish

Q What do the findings of the survey in *Science* magazine mean for your health?

A This study does not present any new safety concerns. The levels of dioxins found in farmed salmon are below the safety levels set by the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Union (EU) and the United States Food and Drug Administration.

Q Why does this research say there is a problem?

A This study has based its conclusions on a risk assessment process that has been under consideration in the US since 1991 by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This process is not recognised by international organisations responsible for food safety and public health, which consider it scientifically flawed. The EPA is concerned with environment protection and sets levels for fish caught recreationally in the US. The WHO set safety levels for dioxins and PCBs in 2001 based exclusively on public health protection. These form the basis of safety levels set for consumers who eat fish sold in shops.

Q Surely these are new findings?

A No. These levels of dioxins have previously been reported by the FSA. What is new is the comparison between different fish caught in different oceans. Since dioxins and PCBs are associated with industrial discharges into the sea, it is not surprising that fish from oceans remote from industrial areas have lower levels of these chemicals.

Q Is there no risk then?

A All foods can carry some risks. It is a question of balancing benefits and risks. The known benefits of eating oily fish outweigh any possible risks.

Q What are the benefits?

A There is good evidence that eating oily fish reduces the risk of death from recurrent heart attacks and from first heart attacks.

Q How much should I eat?

A The FSA's advice is that people should consume at least two portions of fish a week – one of which should be oily.

Q What is the FSA doing in relation to oily fish?

A Last year the FSA asked a group of experts to advise on the balance of risks and benefits of eating more than the recommended amount of fish each week regularly over a lifetime. They will report later this year.

Q Isn't the problem of dioxin pollution in food getting worse?

A No. The FSA measures the quantity of dioxins people take in from all the food that they eat. Between 1997 and 2001 the average adult intake of these chemicals has halved.

Q Can I still eat Scottish farmed salmon or any farmed salmon?

A There is no reason to avoid eating Scottish farmed salmon or any other salmon. Research carried out by the Agency has shown no significant difference in levels of contaminants between farmed and wild salmon from the UK. We are carrying out further research in this area.

Q Are there controls on what is fed to farmed salmon?

A Yes. The EU sets maximum levels for dioxins that may be in fish feed.

FSA launches campaign to improve biosecurity on chicken farms

On 19 January, the Food Standards Agency launched a campaign to improve biosecurity on chicken farms. This campaign is part of the Agency's strategy to control *Campylobacter* in UK-produced chickens and is linked to its Food Hygiene Campaign.

Campylobacter is the most common cause of food poisoning in the UK and evidence indicates that chicken is the major source of this bacteria in people's kitchens. Therefore, reducing *Campylobacter* in chicken is a priority for the Agency. The Agency's strategy focuses on the chicken farm but also considers potential options for control in the slaughterhouse.

Agency studies have shown that although biosecurity standards across the industry are generally high, some of the most basic hygiene measures are not followed at all times on many farms. The campaign aims to ensure that best practices are followed at all times.

The campaign, which will have three phases, will initially target chicken farmers with a leaflet, 'Cleaner farms, better flocks' and an accompanying poster that highlight the main biosecurity

messages. These messages include:

- Keep livestock away from poultry houses.
- Only allow essential visitors.
- Use dedicated boots for each house.
- Wash or sanitise hands before and after visiting each house.
- Eliminate vermin.

The campaign is also being widely promoted to other key stakeholder groups and interested parties. The leaflet and poster have been developed in conjunction with Defra and the poultry industry and are endorsed by UK Agriculture Departments.

Further phases will provide farmers with more detailed information on best practice and promote more specific measures for controlling *Campylobacter*.

Further information

Details on the Agency's work in this area are available on the Agency's website at: www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/chickens

For further information contact David Alexander, tel: 020 7276 8949; fax: 020 7276 8907; email: david.alexander@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Potato cheats have had their chips

Action taken against potato cheats, following an FSA survey that found significant mislabelling of potatoes, has had a welcome effect in forcing errant suppliers to clean up their act.

The Agency first tackled the hot potato of mislabelling early last year with a survey of potato samples in February and April in 30 regional locations in England, Wales and Scotland.

This first survey found that 33% of potatoes were labelled incorrectly, including 17% that were not the variety they were claimed to

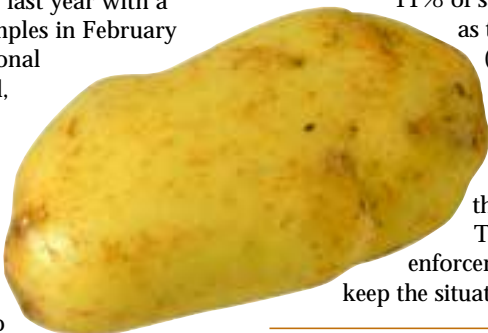
be. In some cases this led to consumers paying higher prices for premium products when actually they were being given cheaper varieties.

In the light of the FSA findings, local authority enforcement staff followed up cases where labelling information was lacking or inaccurate and reminded retailers of their responsibility to ensure

they receive the correct information from their suppliers to allow them to label their products for sale correctly.

The latest FSA survey, of potatoes collected in June 2003, found that the situation had improved and that only 11% of samples were labelled as the wrong variety (17% in the earlier survey). Another 11% were not labelled with sufficient information (16% in the earlier survey).

The Agency and enforcement authorities will keep the situation under review.



Further information

The Survey to investigate the varietal labelling of potatoes Part 1 (44/03) is at: www.food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/fsis-2003/fsis443 The Survey to investigate the varietal labelling of potatoes Part 2 (45/03) is at: www.food.gov.uk/science/surveillance/fsis-2003/fsis4503

Agency Board open meeting

The Food Standards Agency held an open Board Meeting on 11 December 2003 at the Congress Centre in London. Three main papers were considered: a 'Review of the Agency's Dietary Surveys Programme'; 'Nutrition Action Plan: Progress Report'; and the 'Food Standards Agency Policy on Radiological Protection from Foods'.

Review of the Agency's Dietary Surveys Programme

The review of the dietary survey-programme was prompted by four key elements: a lack of timeliness in the current approach; a lack of flexibility; practical issues; and cost-effectiveness.

Nutrition Action Plan: Progress Report

This paper set out the progress made on a broad front across four areas of the Agency's Nutrition Action Plan, agreed by the Board in December 2001, and since the last progress report in December 2002, including two areas of special note: salt, and the promotion of foods to children.

Food Standards Agency policy on radiological protection of foods

This paper covered three main aspects of the FSA's work on radiological protection of foods – assessments, monitoring and emergency response.

The Board also heard a brief report on an information paper on UK Controls on Imported Foods.

The next open Board meeting will be on 12 February in Birmingham. Papers to be discussed include: Local Authority Monitoring; 2002 Annual Report; Public Accounts Committee report on the Agency; Board meetings – options for the future; Pesticide Minimisation – progress report.

Further information

A summary report of the December meeting is at: www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/fsboardupdatedecember2003 The papers are in full at: www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/ourboard/boardmeetings/board2003/boardmeeting111203/ For more details, contact PK Khaira, tel: 020 7276 8214; email: pk.khaira@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk To register for the next Food Standards Agency open Board meeting, email: fsboardmeetings@glasgows.co.uk Tel: 01772 767730; fax: 01772 767555.

Focus on nutrition

In April 2003, FSA Chair Sir John Krebs announced that the Agency was to increase its focus on diet and health and work with others across Government to 'educate the next generation' to enable them to improve their dietary health.

In the shorter term, the Agency would be aiming to ensure food labels are informative and can be interpreted correctly, he said. In the longer term it would be working with the food industry to re-formulate processed foods to reduce their salt content.

One of the keys will be work with children, he said.

Further information

Sir John Krebs' speech is in full at: www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/webpage/diethealthforumspeech

Website one-stop-shop

The FSA launched a new website portal to help food law enforcers carry out their work more effectively and easily.

The portal, located on the Agency's website, serves as an online one-stop shop, giving access to all the essential information about food law enforcement.

It brings together in one place all of the existing enforcement information that was previously located at various places across the Agency's website. It also provides new information and services.

Further information

The portal can be found at: www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/

Detective work pays off

The Agency issued regular updates during 2003 after illegal dye Sudan 1, a genotoxic carcinogen banned under the 1995 Colours in Food Regulations, was found in certain chilli products.

In December the FSA helped thwart an attempt by the Gautam Export Corporation to export chilli products contaminated with Sudan I

The Indian Spice Board had suspended the firm's export licence but the FSA was tipped off that the firm had apparently resumed trading as the SG Spice and Seed Trading Corporation.

The FSA passed this information on to the Spice Board and the firm's licence was suspended.

Further information

More details about Sudan I in food is on the Agency's website at: www.food.gov.uk/safereating/sudani/

School lunchbox campaign offers a choice of healthier, balanced meals

The FSA has issued practical tips to parents on how to reduce saturated fat, salt and sugar in children's lunchboxes. It has also compiled a month's lunchbox menus to help parents give their children a healthy and balanced meals every day.

The Agency launched its school lunchbox campaign when a UK-wide survey it commissioned revealed that 9 out of 10 children's school lunchboxes contain foods that are too

high in saturated fat, salt and sugar.

It found that at lunchtime, children eat as much as twice the recommended amount of sugar and close to half of their daily recommended salt intake. They are also taking in high levels of saturated fats.

The salt tended to come from foods such as white bread, ham and crisps, and the sugar came mainly from fizzy drinks, ready-to-drink juice drinks and chocolate-covered bars and biscuits.



Healthier lunchboxes may help pupils be more alert at school in the afternoon

Further information

The lunchbox suggestions, lunchbox tips and facts can be viewed and downloaded from the Agency's website at: www.food.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/lunchboxes

Agency launches groundbreaking advice on vitamins and minerals

New advice based on the most comprehensive review of the safety of vitamins and minerals ever undertaken in Europe was issued by the FSA in May 2003.

The advice, developed by the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals (EVM), an independent advisory committee, focused on vitamins and minerals that could have possible harmful effects if taken in too high a dose.

The process involved an assessment of more than 10,000 pieces of evidence on any harmful effects associated with each vitamin and mineral including an examination of international research.

The Agency's advice made clear that the amounts of most vitamins and minerals that people take are not thought to be harmful. But some substances may have irreversible harmful effects if taken for long periods in the highest doses.

These include beta-carotene (especially for smokers and people who have been exposed to asbestos), nicotinic acid, zinc, manganese (especially for older people) and phosphorus.

Levels of vitamin C above 1000 mg a day could cause abdominal pain and diarrhoea. Similarly, high intakes of calcium (above 1500 mg a day) and iron (above 17 mg a day) may result in similar symptoms in some people.

However, these symptoms should go once people stop taking the supplements.

Launching the advice, Agency Chair Sir John Krebs said: 'While in most cases you can get all the nutrients you need from a balanced diet, many people choose to take supplements.

'But taking some high dose supplements over a long period of time could be harmful.

'We are using an extremely thorough independent expert review of the scientific evidence on the safety of vitamins and minerals as the basis for new advice to help consumers make informed choices.'

Further information

For further information on the review of vitamins and minerals, go to www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/vitaminsminerals/



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Defusing the diet timebomb

Levels of obesity in England have almost trebled over the past 20 years, and it is predicted that by 2010 a quarter of adults will be obese.

An overweight adolescent has a 70% chance of becoming an overweight adult. Today, an estimated 8.5% of six year olds, and 15% of 15 year olds, are obese.

As well as increasing mortality in itself, being obese is a risk factor for a wide range of diseases. An overweight woman is 12 times as likely to develop type-2 diabetes as a woman of a healthy weight. Coronary heart disease is the most common cause of death among obese people and links have been established with the development of some cancers. There may also be social and psychological effects for children as well as adults, including stigmatisation, discrimination, prejudice, low self-image and depression.

Obesity is also a serious issue for the economic health of the country. The National Audit Office estimates that the direct and indirect effects of obesity currently, for England alone, cost the economy £2.6bn a year, and that this will rise by another billion pounds by the end of the decade.

This is why the Chief Medical Officer for England, in his 2002 Annual Report, describes childhood obesity as a 'public health time bomb'. He calls upon the food industry to 'take a more responsible approach to the promotion (especially to children) of foods high in fat, salt and added sugars and balance this with the promotion of healthier options, including fruit and vegetables'.

Clearly, obesity is linked to an imbalance between calories in and energy out. So both diet and activity are key factors in the issue of obesity.

Improvements in children's diets would also bring about wider benefits.

FSA Chair Sir John Krebs said: 'We know that the level of obesity in children is rising. By 2010 it could cost £3.6 billion a year and be a very significant factor in the ill health of thousands of people and their families. This is why the Agency is encouraging a wide debate on the options for action that could make a difference. Doing nothing is not an option.'

We should not, however, underestimate the complexity of the task. There are a number of influences on children's diets, including individual preferences; social, parental and peer influences; the lack of availability of certain foods; the many ways in which foods are marketed and promoted, including the way foods can be designed to appeal to children in particular. Promotional activity covers a wide range of areas, including the way food is labelled; the composition of foods promoted for children, including food eaten outside the home; TV and print advertising; and 'new media'.

Many of these issues are developed in this special FSA News supplement, produced to coincide with the Agency's debate on Defusing the Diet Timebomb. Further information is available on the Agency's website at: www.food.gov.uk

Advertising to children has an effect on their preferences, purchase behaviour and consumption



The Hastings Review: Does Food Promotion Influence Children?

In January 2003 the Food Standards Agency commissioned research to review the available evidence on the effect of food promotions on children's diets



Professor Gerard Hastings

The Food Standards Agency's contact with stakeholders up to the end of 2002 had shown that many groups disagreed about the extent to which children are influenced by advertising. It was clear that some firm evidence was needed to help us consider what form of action was appropriate.

In January 2003 the Agency commissioned research to review the evidence on the effect of food promotions on children's diets. The research team, led by Professor Gerard Hastings from the University of Strathclyde Centre for Social Marketing, included experts from six British universities.

In order to be sure that they had looked at all the relevant evidence, the team used 'systematic review' methods, which are borrowed from medical science. The systematic searches revealed a huge number of references, which were whittled down to about 100 of the most relevant pieces of work. The team then analysed this work in order to draw their conclusions.

Despite the amount of evidence, it was recognised that it would still be difficult to establish whether there is a direct link between food promotion and obesity. This is because of the many other factors (such as family, friends, and price) that play a part in determining what children eat.

The team approached this problem by breaking the question down and considering some of the issues separately. The team considered whether food promotion influences children's nutritional

knowledge; their food preferences; their food purchases; and their food consumption. The Agency also wanted to know what the extent of the influence was compared to other factors, and whether it applies to different types of food as well as different brands.

Analysing a wide range of studies revealed that a lot of food ads were aimed at children. These were dominated by TV ads, especially ones for pre-sugared breakfast cereals, soft drinks, sweets and savoury snacks. Fast food outlets are also starting to advertise more widely to children. The focus is on fun, fantasy and taste, rather than health and nutrition.

The review found plenty of evidence that children noticed and enjoyed these ads.

The researchers found that, for example, seeing soft drink and cereal ads reduced primary school children's ability to work out whether products contained real fruit.

The review also suggested that food promotion has an impact on the food children prefer and, ultimately, what they buy and eat. One study showed that labels and signs on a vending machine had an effect on what children bought while another showed that advertising influenced what they chose as their playtime snack.

The review revealed that very few studies have tried to find out how strong the effects of food promotion are compared with other factors. Nevertheless, because the studies only look at the direct effects of promotions (and not the indirect effect of promotions influencing children via family and friends) the studies may well underestimate the influence of promotions on children.

Professor Hastings said the review reached a number of significant conclusions about the link between promotional activities and children's eating behaviour. 'In particular, it concludes that advertising to children does have an effect on their preferences, purchase behaviour and consumption, and these effects are apparent not just for different brands but also for different types of food.

'The debate should now shift to what action is needed, and specifically to how the power of commercial marketing can be used to bring about improvements in young people's eating,' the researchers conclude.

Further information

For the full report go to: www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/promote

Fact box – health

In 1998 an estimated 30,000 deaths were attributable to obesity. Obesity reduces life expectancy, on average, by nine years.

Source: Tackling Obesity in England, National Audit Office, 2001

The four most common chronic health problems linked to obesity are:

- heart disease
- type 2 diabetes
- high blood pressure
- osteoarthritis

There is also a clear link with some cancers.

Source: Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 220 Session 2000-2001: 15 Feb 2001

Fact box – diet and lifestyle

Children in Britain eat on average only two portions of fruit and vegetables a day – with one in five eating no fruit at all.

Source: National Diet and Nutrition Survey, Young People, 1997

The consumption of fizzy drinks has almost doubled in the past 15 years. Young adults now drink an average of six cans each week.

Source: National Diet and Nutrition Survey 2002

Meals and snacks eaten outside the home tend to be higher in fat (with about 40% of calories coming from fat).

Source: National Food Survey 2000

The amount of energy in an average chicken nugget takeaway meal (707kcal per portion) is 30% higher than a traditional cooked meal (542kcal); a quarter-pounder with cheese meal (826kcal) is 52% higher than a traditional cooked meal.

Source: McCance and Widdowson's The Composition of Foods, 6th edition

Portion sizes are getting larger, particularly in 'energy-dense' snacks and fast foods. 'Supersizing' of fast foods is an increasingly popular trend in the UK.

Source: Chief Medical Officer, Annual Report 2002

More fact boxes, [pxii](#)

Options for action

To stimulate discussion, the FSA has drawn up a list of potential policy options related to promotional activity that could affect children's diets and health. These options could provide a starting point for action involving the food industry, parents, schools, local authorities, central Government and others

It is likely that the most effective way to encourage children to eat a more healthy diet is by combining a number of policy options into a balanced plan of action. There is also more than one way of putting these measures into place.

Many of the options could be taken forward on a voluntary basis, with the Agency and food industry working together to draft guidelines. There is also the possibility that new legislation could be put in place to enforce new rules.

Research

Whatever action is taken, it may be useful to carry out further research at the same time. This could include establishing baseline information to enable the impact of future policies to be evaluated, or assessing whether it is practical, or ethical, to carry out a 'definitive' experiment on the impact of promotional activity on children's diets or general health.

Labelling

Foods aimed at children, or popular with children, could provide full nutrition information on the pack. Also, if the product is high or low in fat, sugar or salt, this could be declared on the front of the

pack, possibly by means of a logo. There might be a requirement for health claims on foods for children to be approved by the Joint Health Claims Initiative (JHCI), and comply with the JHCI Code of Practice on Health Claims. Also there might be a restriction on making nutrition claims on foods that are less healthy

Food composition

The Agency is already working successfully with retailers and food producers to reduce the amount of salt in some processed foods. This work could be extended to find ways to reduce the amount of fat and sugar in foods popular with children.

Broadcasting and advertising

This could include finding ways to redress the balance in food advertising. One way of doing this would be to ban, or to restrict in some way, advertising for certain foods on television. It could also include encouraging the industry to advertise healthier foods. Food promotions are about more than just TV adverts, so some broader options could include encouraging characters from children's programmes to promote

healthier foods rather than less healthy foods, or agreeing a policy on the way in which celebrities and children's TV characters, are used in food promotions.

Catering outlets

Restaurants, take-aways and snack bars could offer a range of healthier options, and highlight these on their menus. Catering outlets could also provide more information on the nutritional content of the food they offer.

Schools

The FSA already has a lot of work underway on nutritional education in schools. The Department of Health and Department for Education and Science also have a programme on school catering. Even so, there might be scope for more action such as including healthier options in vending machines, or agreeing a policy on food promotions (such as voucher collection schemes) that offer educational materials or equipment to schools.

Further information

To comment on the options go to: www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/promotion/haveyoursay/

Paul Lincoln, Chief Executive, National Heart Forum



The National Heart Forum believes that immediate and unequivocal action should be taken by Government and the food and

marketing industries to stop all forms of marketing of foods high in fat, sugars and salt to children. This may sound radical but radical solutions are required if we want effective action now. The NHF has demonstrated in young @heart (www.heartforum.org.uk) that the origins of avoidable and linked chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes, start at the beginning of life and food preferences are mainly formed between the ages of two and seven years.

Charlie Powell, Sustain



Ninety three national organisations already support Sustain's call for legislation to protect children from unhealthy food promotions. This shows

overwhelming support from medical professionals, health charities, children's organisations and parents. The only people arguing against statutory controls are some in the food and advertising industries. They know – and the research shows – that the millions of pounds they spend each year targeting ads for fatty, sugary and salty foods at children generate huge sales. Unhealthy food advertising boosts industry profits at the expense of children's health. Effective controls are desperately needed.

Ed Mayo, Chief Executive, National Consumer Council



Close to 10% of six year olds are obese – significantly raising the health risks of diabetes, cancer and heart disease in later life.

Unless tough decisions are made and real action taken now, that figure will continue to soar.

We are all responsible for changing our children's diets – from government to food producers, retailers, schools and parents. But with advertising spend on chocolate and snacks running at £200m, the National Consumer Council believes it is time that children were protected from the weight of advertising targeted at them – both simple and sophisticated.

The battle of the bulge: tackling the problem of childhood obesity

Below we publish extracts of a speech on obesity made last year by Agency Chair Sir John Krebs at the Westminster Diet & Health Forum

'I start by making several assumptions on behalf of us all here today: that we have a significant problem on our hands; that we are not prepared to sit back and let life expectancy go down or ignore all the other consequences of the obesity timebomb; that we are looking for answers; and we recognise that there are no simple solutions.

Even if the problem can be reduced to a simple physical equation between energy in and energy out, how to deal with that apparently simple imbalance is not a straightforward matter.

What has changed in the last 20 years? Certainly not genetics. Possibly energy intake. And probably energy output. Eating habits have changed, and people are now eating more energy-dense food – which probably works against the grain of the body's natural body mass regulatory mechanism.

When I leave Oxford in the mornings, I see the kids going to the local school eating their breakfast of two packets of crisps and a can of fizzy pop – a perfect example of energy dense, high fat, high

sugar food being consumed at the start of the day.

The Health Development Agency recently produced an analysis of the efficacy of measures in the management of obesity and overweight, looking at what works and what doesn't.

Basically, it makes the point that we need to be tackling [energy] intake and expenditure together, and that we need to get on with it, with concentrated focus and effort.

Just as an example of the difficulty of working off calories, I go to a local gym regularly, and I see people do 25 minutes or so on the treadmill and come off having really worked hard to burn off, say, around 200 calories. Then they go to the soft drinks machine and put the 200 calories straight back on with one quick drink. To me this illustrates why, if anything, dietary changes might be more effective than exercising – though both have to be worked on together – as part of the jigsaw of measures needed to tackle obesity.

The Food Standards Agency's responsibility within this very complex mix is to advise the Government and public on food and the balance of the diet. Within that remit, one particular area I would like to talk about is the work we are doing on how food is labelled, promoted, and advertised.

A shift in mood

The Food Standards Agency recently launched a paper in which we described a range of possible options for action in relation to promotion and advertising food to children (see page iii). This followed a review in which we looked through every significant piece of research into the evidence of the effects on children of promotion and advertising of food (see page ii).

The media coverage since that time has snowballed, and I think has contributed to a shift in public mood. I sense, as compared to the situation four years ago when I joined the Agency, that there's [also been] a shift in mood within the industry – which is to be welcomed. And I think people are asking what is going to be done, rather than if anything will happen, in relation to promotion and advertising to children.

But there are polarised views. On the one hand, there are the 'hanny state-ists' who favour the path of informing and educating the public and letting them choose. On the other, there are the interventionists, who argue for bans and controls.

And then there are the 'in-betweenists,' who are in favour of some combination of voluntary action and education, particularly with the most vulnerable groups in society – children and less well off consumers – who have less opportunity to make use of information.

To quote from a selection of opinion polls published recently, there was one by YouGov, which showed 94% of respondents saying children's diets were the responsibility of parents. A few months earlier, an ICM poll in the Guardian, had 79% thinking food manufacturers are irresponsible.

And a more recent MORI poll shows that 84% of parents think that food companies target children too much in their marketing.

Education and information in schools

The Food Standards Agency's Deputy Chair, Julia Unwin, recently gave a talk at this forum in which she referred to a range of work we're doing in the school environment. One particularly high profile piece of work that was formally launched by the Minister of Public Health Melanie Johnson, is our School



*Just delicious:
Agency Chair
Sir John Krebs gets
the message on the
School Fruit Scheme
from children in Key
Stage 1 in Star
School, Canning
Town, Newham,
east London*

Cooking Bus (see page xvi).

It's called a bus, but is actually more of a pantechnicon, which converts into a mobile kitchen classroom, and is a method of bringing practical cooking skills and knowledge of nutrition and food hygiene to children in schools where they don't have facilities in-house.

Food labelling

Moving from education to choice, there is no point telling people about healthy choices unless they have signposts on the food on which they can base those choices. But the signposts aren't always that clear. If you want to eat healthily, and look at a typical nutrition label, you're told, for example, that a particular breakfast cereal contains 1,848 kilojoules per 100 grams, 65.3 grams of carbohydrates, and 16.6 grams of fat. Unless you're a nutritionist, it's very hard to tell what you are getting from that information. There is no signpost saying 'good' or 'bad' if you want to cut down on fat.

Another thing that I think we need to be very aware of is the notion of some foods that might be signposted as healthy in relation to one nutrient, whilst having quantities of another nutrient that would not qualify for a health claim. I caricature this as, for example, a chocolate bar with added vitamin C. We would not want to see this labelled as a good source of vitamin C."

Promotion and advertising

Now, let me return to the subject of promotion and advertising. And not just TV advertising. I'm talking about the whole range of promotion tools that are used by the industry: super-sizing, two for the price of one offers, text messaging, use of media icons like the Teletubbies or David Beckham, vending machines in schools, sponsorship, exchanging confectionery wrappers for sports kits and so on.

As you will know, the FSA has commissioned a review of the literature on the impact of these forms of promotion and advertising on children's food preferences. The review was carried out by a team led by Professor Gerard Hastings from the University of Strathclyde (see page ii).

It concluded that, not only is most of the promotion and advertising for foods that are high in salt, sugar and fat – as groups like the Food Commission have been telling us for years – but it confirmed that the way the food is promoted and advertised doesn't relate to its dietary consequences but focuses more on images of lifestyle, fun and associations with icons and celebrities.

Most importantly, the Hastings study concluded that this promotion and advertising, in the broad sense, influences children's preferences and dietary habits – not just in relation to brands (chocolate bar A versus chocolate bar B) – but also in relation to categories: sweets versus fruit, for example.

At the same time, the Food Advertising Unit commissioned a study by Dr Brian Young from the University of Exeter, which asserts that advertising has no impact on the dietary preferences of children – and that the major influences are peer pressure and parents, or the family background.

Both of these studies have been put in front of a neutral jury of distinguished academics, chaired by Professor Mackintosh FRS, former Head of the Psychology Department in Cambridge, and the jury heard the presentations from the two experts and questioned them. The jury's deliberations are published on our website, and are that:

- the Hastings review is more systematic and robust, and
- that the group of academics on the jury support the thrust of the Hastings' review.

I'm aware that the food industry has also commissioned experts to scrutinise the Hastings report and [that] their expert teams of academics [have concluded] that the conclusions of the Hastings review are not justified.

But let's not get into that argument. The evidence is sufficiently robust, let's move on. The question is, though, where do we go next?

As I mentioned earlier, the FSA has put out an options paper for discussion, and we are listening to the different points of view on our proposals.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to be aware of the intricacies. If you want to ban something, what do you ban, where do you ban it, and how would you implement it? If you want to have a voluntary code – and we've already heard that the industry is considering voluntary action – what do you put in the voluntary code? So the devil will be in the details – and that is what we have to start to uncover.

Conclusion

I'll end by saying there is a need for a co-ordinated approach involving different parts of government and many others – the Food Standards Agency being one piece of the jigsaw.'

Further information

More on the Hastings review and an industry-funded scrutiny is at: www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/foodpromotionpanel

Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills



Schools have an important role to play in the development of children's diets, as eating habits are formed early in life. That is why

I'm working with Health Secretary John Reid to develop an action plan that will set out how to make healthy living a key part of school life.

Our joint Food in Schools programme covers what children learn in the classroom and what they eat during the day. They learn about diet, hygiene, nutrition, and the benefits of healthy eating, while our nutritional standards set out what school meals should include.

But for this to succeed, food manufacturers have to work with us, and think about the role they play and how they promote their goods to children.

David Felwick, Chairman, British Retail Consortium

As responsible retailers we continue to seek ways to make our products more nutritious and healthy, and more easily identifiable with improved labelling and product descriptions.



We also strongly support the regulatory framework that governs the advertising and marketing of foods to children. It is unquestionable that diet, along with exercise, plays a central role in the health of our children, which is why we believe that Government should take the lead in encouraging children to appreciate the components of a healthy diet by providing clear, simple, consistent and scientifically credible messages.

However, along with health professionals, we do caution against the artificial segregation of foods as 'good' or 'bad.' Such a move could be counterproductive, leading to message dilution or even dietary imbalance.

The Food Standards Agency regularly holds stakeholder meetings to ensure the development of its policy is informed by the widest possible discussion. A recent stakeholder meeting addressed the issue of food promotions and children's diet

Gathering views on the promotion of foods and children

Representatives from food retailers and manufacturers, the advertising industry, parents' groups, consumer organisations and Government departments, agreed at a meeting on 4 December that childhood obesity was a serious concern.

There were, however, some differences of opinion as to the role various groups should play, and the approach that should be adopted.

More than 80 stakeholders with an interest in food, diet and nutrition took part in the event, which was organised by the Food Standards Agency at its headquarters in London.

The Agency organised the meeting following the publication in September 2003 of Agency-commissioned research that concluded that advertising affects children's food choices and purchasing behaviour – both in terms of the brands they buy and the types of food they choose (see page ii).

Following the publication of this research, the Agency issued a discussion paper (see page iii) suggesting a number of possible policy options that might be adopted on the promotion of foods to children.

The Agency's 4 December stakeholder meeting discussed a number of areas in which progress could be made: food composition, food labelling, broadcast advertising and the food service sector.

Food composition

Some consumer representatives suggested that improving the composition of foods aimed at children was very important but that industry needed a 'carrot and stick' approach.

There was a feeling that a level playing field for all the people in the industry was needed, and that this would only be achieved with legislation or some kind of financial incentives and disincentives that affect everyone equally.

What was important was creating an incentive to change.

It was noted that retailers and the Agency were already working well together to reduce the amount of salt on some processed foods, and that this work could be built on.

Another view was that some cereals aimed at children contained close to 45% sugar, which raised concerns about the use of cartoon characters to promote these less healthy foods. There was a feeling that in many cases it would be much better if the parents just bought the adult versions for their children.

Food labelling

There was wide agreement that some consumers find nutritional labelling difficult to understand.

Some organisations called for compulsory nutrition labelling on foods, noting that this could be extended to include the food service sector. It was recognised that despite nutrition labelling currently being voluntary, it appeared on 80% of pre-packaged foods, and that many retailers had worked hard to put nutrition labelling on virtually all their products.

Everyone recognised that there might be ways to present nutritional information in a more user-friendly and direct way. One idea was for a high/medium/low labelling system in relation to fat, salt and sugar.

Broadcast advertising

There was a strong feeling from many people attending the meeting that action in this area needed to be taken sooner rather than later.

Calls were made at the meeting by consumers and public health organisations for stricter controls on broadcast advertising, ideally legislative. Food industry representatives appeared happy to consider reviews of existing controls but felt that more research would be useful on the potential effects of any changes.

Meanwhile, Ofcom, the UK's new communications industry regulator, which was due to assume its powers at the end of 2003, is reviewing its codes on advertising.

Food service sector

It was recognised that eating out is becoming more prevalent, and there was a suggestion that the food service sector should be encouraged to increase the provision of healthier options in its children's menus. It was felt that the Agency should have a further meeting with representatives of this sector.

All those attending the 4 December event were invited to send in written comments following the meeting and to attend the Agency's Public Debate in January.

■ Although the focus of the 4 December meeting was on nutrition and diet – Agency areas of responsibility – participants agreed that increasing levels of physical activity would also be crucial in reducing obesity among children.



Open to the floor: stakeholder meetings are central to the Agency's approach of transparency and accountability

Breaking new ground on nutrition in schools

The FSA, through its research and development work, continues to initiate projects focused on improving children's nutrition. Below we highlight a few examples of the Agency's recent work

Research and development on nutrition in schools and the improvement of children's diets is an integral part of the work of the Food Standards Agency.

Through its Food Choice research and development programme, the Agency, for example, funded the development and evaluation of *Dish it Up!* an interactive CD-Rom, aimed at helping schools encourage 11-12 year olds to eat more healthily.

Dish it Up!, three copies of which have been sent to every school in the UK, aims to help teenagers develop decision-making skills and self-esteem with regard to healthy eating behaviour.

It provides a virtual day in the life facility, designed to provide personally relevant situations, environments and dilemmas that face 11-12 year olds with respect to food, and offers insights, information and understanding on food-related issues.

Dish it Up!'s central aim is to help teenagers achieve a balanced diet, and it covers a range of issues, including having breakfast, snack foods and lunch in the school canteen.

It also addresses themes such as self-esteem, peer pressure, physical activity and misconceptions about foods/diets, using interactive educational games and quizzes to provide attention-grabbing fun.

Teacher support materials

'Five a day the Bash Street Way' is a project funded through the Agency's Nutrition Division's research programme.

It tested the efficacy of an intervention consisting of a whole school approach to encouraging primary school children to eat more fruit and vegetables. A small but significant increase in fruit consumption by the children in the two intervention schools was achieved, compared with the two control schools.

Material developed for the intervention based on the Bash Street Kids cartoon characters has been adapted for dissemination on the Agency's website with permission from D C Thompson,



Lunchtime in the school canteen: In this section of 'Dish it Up!' (see left) the pupil is invited to play a game involving mealtime choices, with a focus on barriers such as lack of choice, time pressures, cost and variety

which holds copyright to the characters. The material is available on: www.food.gov.uk/interactivetools/educational/bashstreetdiet/

School lunch-time club support

'Be Smart' was another project funded through the Food Choice research and development programme.

It tested the efficacy of three different interventions aimed at preventing the development of obesity in primary school children. It tested nutrition education alone, physical activity alone, and a combination of the two approaches, compared to a control group of children.

The interventions were delivered through lunchtime clubs at schools. The Agency is adapting some of the support material for its website, where it will be placed in 2004.

Drinks vending machines

The Agency has commissioned the Health Education Trust to develop, pilot and evaluate economically viable healthier drinks vending in secondary schools. Testing of healthier drinks vending machines has taken place in four areas. A report on the research is due to be published soon.

If successful, the work will establish guidelines for healthier drinks vending, which will be disseminated widely. It is hoped that the project will identify a model for rolling out guidance to enable the promotion of a greater uptake of healthier drinks during the school day.

Further information

Details of the Agency's work on school lunchboxes, its Gimme 5! CD-Rom, and its School Cooking Bus can be found on other pages in this supplement.

Jeremy Preston, Director, Food Advertising Unit (FAU)

The advertising industry, with the whole food chain, is committed to playing a constructive role in tackling the serious problem of being overweight/obesity and we welcome opportunities for



constructive open dialogue and action with all stakeholders in order to find effective, lasting solutions.

It is essential that any policy is based upon sound evidence and not opinion.

We believe the advertising industry has a role to play, in partnership with others, in informing consumers and promoting healthy diets and lifestyles.

The industry supports advertising regulations and welcomes regular, evidence-based reviews, conducted through public consultation.

Kath Dalmeny, Policy Officer, The Food Commission



Help parents and teachers to promote good health!

Food is often a source of conflict for parents trying to persuade their children to try healthy food. It's hard

work – it needs reinforcement every day.

Sadly, for many children, the food message reinforced every day is that fast food, sugary drinks and fatty snacks are 'cool'.

While parents and teachers encourage children to enjoy healthy eating, the 'cool' foods and drinks are those linked to free toys, cartoons and the apparent endorsement of popstars and footballers.

If we believe that children's diets are the responsibility of parents, nurseries and schools, then we should support them and prevent their good work from being undermined by unhealthy food marketing.

So what do the children think?

What do children think about food promotion and how the food industry advertises its produce? And do they really care about their health? Would they change their lifestyle choices if they had to? In a non-scientific snapshot survey, *FSA News* has interviewed ten children, aged 7 to 14, attending two very different North London schools to try to find out. The 7-11 year olds all attend a primary school in a leafy suburb of north London. The children aged 12-14 attend a comprehensive secondary school in the middle of an urban area of high deprivation. Although from very different backgrounds, the children's views were remarkably similar



Sebastian Brennan

Establishing a link between advertising and food-related health problems now being diagnosed in young people is extremely difficult because of the many other factors involved.

Some children may be influenced by their parents' eating choices; others may be using up any excess calories in their food intake through physical activity. Parents of younger children surveyed by the FSA tend to send them to school with a packed lunch, so that they can exert a certain amount of influence over what their children are eating during the day.

'My parents give me a packed lunch because they can control what goes into it and also because it is much healthier than school dinners,' says eight year old Freya. 'I usually have sandwiches, crisps, some fruit and a chocolate biscuit.'

Ten year old Iskander has fruit, crisps

and carrots in his lunchbox. 'I know fruit is good and healthy and gives you energy. A balanced diet means a little bit of everything and not too much sweet stuff,' he says.

By the time children get to secondary school it is often too late to change their dietary habits and many of the older children surveyed feel they get enough exercise to counteract the calories they consume in 'junk food'. Most of them also get a home-cooked meal in the evening, which they are confident ensures they get the 'balanced diet' they have learned about in school.

'There is very little choice in what you can eat at school,' says 14 year old Mark Smith. 'I usually have burger and chips but I don't really think about food that much. I know you need vitamins to grow, but I get a healthy meal when I get home.'

'We know all about the obesity epidemic because we have seen it on the news,' says 14 year old Sebastian Brennan. 'I do think about my health and eat salads sometimes. I am vegetarian, so I often choose the veggie option in the cafeteria at school. Other times I just eat chips and beans.'

'We get fruit in school, but there is not much variety – just oranges, apples and bananas,' adds 14 year old Joseph Macdonald. 'Nobody really encourages us to eat the fruit – it's just there if you want it. I probably do eat quite a lot of rubbish.'

'I work on a Saturday and get paid £20. I spend it all on food and snacks – chicken and chips, and sweets. I don't think it matters 'cos I play football a lot. I don't think I am influenced by sporting heroes on TV 'cos I eat what I want. I don't really think they have a responsibility to young people in what they are endorsing on the advertisements. They just want to earn money, and who can blame them?'

Many of the younger children look to their parents to give a lead on the amount of exercise they do.

'My family are quite health-conscious and fit, and we often go out as a family and run around in the park,' says Freya. 'At school I play netball and football, and I often go swimming.'

'I like running around – it makes me feel good. If we go out together as a family we often play rounders or go to the local swimming pool.'

'After school we are allowed to watch some TV, but only for about an hour. We are also allowed to use the computer and use the Internet for homework. We're not allowed just to surf the Net though.'

Nine year old Lewis goes ice skating, plays tennis and football, and does a one-mile fun run every year. 'There are kids in my class who are fat. They aren't very sporty and spend all their time collecting Pokemon cards and eating crisps,' he says. 'We cycle or walk to most places and we are only allowed to watch TV at the weekends.'

Most of the older children admitted to watching quite a lot of TV and many were disillusioned with local leisure-centre facilities.

'I watch about two hours of TV every night,' says Sebastian. 'We have got cable and there are lots of good programmes out there. I also like *Eastenders*.'

'Our leisure centre is hopeless,' adds 13 year old Joseph, who gets a bus to a park a few miles away to play football.

'I like watching TV and have got cable. I like the comedy channel. I have also got a Playstation and often slump in front of that for a couple of hours when I get home from school,' he adds.

Mark reckons he watches about two hours of TV each night. Thirteen year old Katie claims to watch no TV but says she spends all of her time watching horror DVDs.

'I can't be bothered to do any exercise – only PE – and I don't like that much. I don't really worry about food either. I don't think it's very important what you eat,' she says.

Most of the children we spoke to did not believe that they were influenced by food advertising, although many thought that Christmas advertising put too much pressure on parents to spend money and some felt there was too much emphasis on the advertising of alcohol.

'I don't think TV advertising will make me go and do something I don't want to do. Advertising doesn't really affect me,' says Sebastian.



Freya

'If sporting heroes are influencing young people to eat unhealthily it's stupid, because we look up to them,' says 15 year old Dean. 'If they are advertising unhealthy food, kids are going to follow. They should try and do stuff that doesn't affect kids' health.'

■ The interviews were carried out in consultation with the schools concerned and permission to quote the children and use their images was given by the schools and the children's parents.



Dean Baxter

Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport



I recognise the concerns that people have about the growing problem of childhood obesity and about advertising's role in it. That's why I have

written to Ofcom to ask them to consider proposals for strengthening the existing codes on advertising food to children.

But advertising is only one part of the bigger picture.

Childhood obesity must be tackled on a broad front by placing more emphasis on school sport and active living, promotion of healthy eating and improving media literacy.

Paul Streets OBE, Chief Executive, Health Development Agency



Health Development Agency evidence shows parents have an important role in helping tackle childhood obesity, so it's

time for a review of the controls that should support parents in giving children a healthy diet.

The food and advertising industry has been allowed to vigorously promote its products to children and there is evidence that this has changed the way they eat.

If we want to ensure that children have the right to a healthy balanced diet then we need to create a level playing field. This includes deciding whether we want schools to be 'junk food' free, and whether product link-ups and sponsorship in schools from food companies should be restricted.

Defusing the Diet Timebomb

The FSA has organised a debate on the promotion of foods and children and the effects it has on children's diets and rising levels of obesity. The debate, which is taking place on 27 January 2004 at the QE2 Conference Centre in London, is being broadcast live on Sky digital channel 687 and webcast on the Agency's website. The expression of views on the Agency's Options for Change paper will continue to be welcomed on the FSA website (see page xv of this supplement) until 6 February 2004. The Agency's Board meeting in March will consider all of the evidence and viewpoints gathered. The Agency intends to draw up recommendations on the promotion of food and children, and publish these for a 12-week consultation before submitting its views to Ministers



Jeremy Vine, Chair of the Debate

Jeremy Vine, who is chairing the Food Standards Agency's debate on 'Defusing the Diet Timebomb', is a well known journalist and TV presenter. He joined the presenting team of BBC 2's flagship *Newsnight* in July 1999, working alongside Jeremy Paxman and Kirsty Wark. He was previously Africa Correspondent, based in Johannesburg, where he reported from wars and trouble spots throughout the continent. Jeremy, who joined the BBC in 1987 as a News Trainee, has held a number of posts on TV and radio, including presenting the *PM* programme. In 1993 he was appointed Political Correspondent based at Millbank. He has presented a weekly programme on 5 Live called *Newstalk*, a weekly round-up of accessible politics with guests from all parties. He began standing in on *Newsnight* in 1996.



Kierra Box, Hands Up For

Since finishing her A-levels, Kierra has co-founded the youth-run organisation, *Hands Up For*, to promote debate with and among young people. Its overriding aim is to ensure that young people's views are taken into account – both on issues that directly affect them and on wider social issues that may affect their future lives. She is currently working with a number of national youth bodies and youth groups, to increase their ability to work directly with young people and make their resources and events more accessible. In the future she hopes to pursue a career promoting democracy and the rights of young people.



Andrew Brown, Director General, The Advertising Association & Chairman, Committee of Advertising Practice

Andrew Brown joined J Walter Thompson in 1965 and spent most of the subsequent 28 years in account management. He joined the Advertising Association as Director General in May 1993. The Advertising Association represents the advertising and promotional marketing industries including advertisers, agencies, media and other services. In 1999 he was appointed as Chairman of the Committee of Advertising Practice, the industry body that writes and enforces the self-regulatory British Codes of Advertising and Promotion, which are independently administered by the Advertising Standards Authority.



Dr Susan Jebb, Head of Nutrition and Health Research, Medical Research Council Centre for Human Nutrition Research

Susan Jebb is a nutrition scientist and a state-registered dietitian and is particularly interested in the role of diet in the development and treatment of obesity. She is currently Chair of the UK Association for the Study of Obesity and is working with Government, industry, health professionals and consumer groups to develop effective public-health strategies to tackle obesity. She is also a member of the Joint Health Claims Initiative Expert Panel assessing nutrition-related health claims in the UK.



Richard D. North, Media Fellow, Institute of Economic Affairs

Richard D. North is a Media Fellow at the Institute of Economic Affairs, and a writer, broadcaster and commentator. He has been an environmental columnist with *The Times*, and an environmental correspondent with *The Independent*. He has written a number of books, including *Life On a Modern Planet: A manifesto for progress*. He is also the author of a number of thought-provoking pamphlets, including *Hereditary Peers: The case as yet unheard*; *The Hunt At Bay*; *Risk: The human adventure*; and *Fur and Freedom: A defence of the fur trade*. Richard also appears regularly as a commentator on television and radio. Recent appearances include the *Today* programme and the *Ali G* Show.



Richard Reeves, writer and analyst

Richard Reeves is a strategy consultant and business analyst. His career spans academia, central government, business, the non-profit sector and the media. Described by *The Guardian* as 'Britain's leading expert on workplace trends', Richard is the co-founder of Intelligence Agency, an ideas consultancy, and has worked with Accenture, ICI, Microsoft, Orange, PricewaterhouseCoopers, BT, the NHS, GE Capital and a wide range of other organisations on corporate strategy and organisational change. He is a columnist for *Management Today*, an essayist for the *New Statesman*, and writes regularly for *The Guardian* and other publications. He is a research associate of the Work Foundation, where he was previously director of research and head of consultancy, and a Trustee of the RSA.



Antony Worrall Thompson, celebrity chef

Antony Worrall Thompson is a well-known chef, TV personality, restaurateur and author. He has been head chef at many prestigious establishments, has opened a number of successful restaurants, and was until recently the chair of the British Restaurateurs Association. He continues to run his own restaurant in London. Antony has won a number of international prizes, including the *Mouton Rostchild* Menu Competition and the *Meilleur Ouvriers de Grand Bretagne* – the chefs' 'Oscar'. He is perhaps best known as a TV celebrity chef, having been resident studio chef on BBC TV's *Food and Drink* programme and a regular on *Ready Steady Cook*. Antony is the author of a number of books on cooking and food, and speaks to students at catering colleges around the country.

What other countries do

Many claims and counterclaims have been made about the approach adopted in other countries to the promotion of foods and children, so what is the situation?

Many other countries have some sort of controls on advertising aimed at children. Countries take different approaches to the problem, by setting rules for the content and nature of individual ads; by restricting the amount of airtime that can be taken up by advertising, or by banning altogether advertising aimed at children.

Rules on advertising content

All EU Member States are subject to the rules of the 'Television Without Frontiers' Directive, which dates from 1989, although it has been updated since. The Directive aims to 'protect the physical, mental and moral development of minors in programmes and in TV advertising'.

The Directive lists certain types of product that should never be advertised to children, such as tobacco, gambling, loans and credit, and contains rules to ensure that the context in which children appear in adverts is acceptable.

Above all, the Directive states that advertising must not take advantage of

children's inexperience, and must not directly encourage children to persuade their parents or carers to buy the products being advertised.

Limits on advertising

A number of countries have limits on the amount of advertising broadcasters can show. In Australia and New Zealand, for example, no more than five minutes of ads can be shown in every half hour of children's programming. (The EU Directive also contains time limits for ads.)

The limit in Australia and New Zealand is actually more generous than the limit that applies in the UK for all programming (seven minutes per hour, rising to eight minutes in primetime).

Legislation to ban advertising

Some countries have banned advertising aimed at children. In Sweden no advertising is allowed during children's programming, and ads at other times must not target children under 12.

This ban has been in effect since 1991, when the first domestic commercial broadcaster was launched. Before 1991, there was no advertising at all on home-produced Swedish TV.

Today, some channels broadcast Swedish-language programming from outside Sweden, and therefore do not have to follow the ban. These channels make up about a quarter of the audience share in Sweden. Swedish legislation does not stop advertising to children through other media, such as magazines or billboards.

The Canadian province of Quebec has gone one step further, and has probably the most restrictive laws on children's advertising. The Quebec Consumer Protection Act, which has been in force since 1980, bans all advertising and marketing aimed at children under 13.

This applies not just to TV, but to all media. Canadian industry challenged the ban in the courts in the early 1980s. However, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the rules were necessary to protect a 'vulnerable group'.

This still doesn't mean that children in Quebec never see any advertising.



Satellite TV from the US is popular throughout Canada, and is not controlled by the Quebec Act.

As one would expect, English-speaking children in Quebec tend to watch more US TV than their French-speaking peers. A study has shown that families where the children watch more US satellite TV buy more of the breakfast cereals advertised on those channels.

The rules in place in Sweden and Quebec weren't designed to make children eat more healthy diets. In both cases, the rules stem from a concern that advertising exploits children, because of their inexperience and natural naivety.

This means that authorities in Sweden and Quebec have not researched the effects of the bans on what children eat, or even the effect on what children choose to spend their money on.

It would be very difficult to design a study that examined the effect of the measures on children's diets. One would have to establish the baseline from which to measure any change, but, because many factors influence what children eat, it would be difficult to establish what was causing any change.

Above all, many factors combine to make the food culture in any country unique – we need to remember this when considering what we can learn from what has happened in other countries.

Yummy apples

Yummy apples, launched in 1994, is the highest-selling apple brand in New Zealand. Children can collect the stickers on individual apples, or the labels on 2kg bags, and trade them in for sports equipment for their school. There are also additional prizes for schools that collect the most stickers per child. The scheme is sponsored by Wynton Rufer, the most popular football star in New Zealand. Since the collection scheme started, more than NZ\$650,000 (£250,000) worth of sports equipment has been donated to primary and intermediate schools throughout New Zealand.

Fact box – obesity

Over the past 10 years obesity among six year olds has doubled (rising to 8.5%) and trebled among 15 year olds (rising to 15%).

Source: Health Survey England 2001

Fact box – obesity

Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.

Source: Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology Postnote 2003, No 205, Childhood Obesity

Fact box – obesity

Obesity levels in England have trebled in the past 20 years; currently around 24 million adults in the UK are overweight or obese, and levels are still rising.

Source: Health Survey England 2001 National Audit Office, 2001

The National School Fruit Scheme

The National School Fruit Scheme (NSFS), which was established to promote healthy eating and help tackle obesity, is to be expanded following a successful pilot in 12 schools in four English regions.

The Department of Health has



Free fruit is proving popular with schoolchildren

announced a total of £77 million of new Government funding to enable the NSFS to be rolled out throughout England.

Until now, the scheme has operated in North West England, the East and West Midlands and Greater London, with £42 million in National Lottery good cause funding from the New Opportunities Fund.

The scheme already provides more than a million children with free fruit at school every day and is the biggest single initiative in child nutrition since the introduction of free school milk in the 1940s.

Apples, pears, bananas and easy-to-peel citrus fruits are currently on the menu, with bananas being voted a firm favourite. The Department of Health will also be extending the scheme by introducing different fresh fruit and vegetables.

The free fruit has proved very popular with children, parents and teachers and a survey commissioned by the Department of Health suggests that it is having a lasting impact on children's eating habits.

The survey shows that:

- over a quarter of children and their families ate more fruit at home after

their school joined the scheme

- nearly half of all parents questioned think the scheme has made them more aware of the importance of fruit for a healthy diet

- eight in 10 parents say their child always or often ate the fruit provided at school

The NSFS is part of the 'five a day' programme to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

The NHS Plan said that all children aged four to six in state schools in England will be entitled to a free piece of fruit or vegetable each school day. This will entail distributing about 440 million pieces of fruit to more than 2 million children in approximately 18,000 schools across England.

The NOP World survey, commissioned by the Department of Health, involved interviews with 1,000 parents of children aged four to six years old living in the NSFS pilot regions and 100 headteachers of infant schools.

Further information

For more details on the National School Fruit Scheme go to: www.dh.gov.uk/fiveaday/schoolfruit.htm

Work of the Activity Co-ordination Team

The health, social and economic costs of obesity and physical inactivity are obvious and tackling the 'couch potato' culture among children and young people is a priority for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Sport and active leisure are part of the solution. But sport only accounts for 8% of all physical activity – on a par with gardening. Wider solutions are needed.

The Activity Co-ordination Team (ACT), chaired by Sports Minister Richard Caborn and Public Health Minister Melanie Johnson, is taking forward the *Game Plan* recommendation to develop a national physical activity strategy for England.

The first three-year phase of ACT's 17-year national strategy will be published soon. This will recommend measures to raise mass participation, particularly among disadvantaged groups, school leavers, women and older people.

Evidence shows that the quality of children's experience of physical education (PE) and sport is a key determinant of whether they will carry on being active in later life.

The Government is working to ensure that at least 75% of children spend a minimum of two hours each week on quality PE or sport by 2006.

It is also known that girls do less sport than boys and are less likely to be active throughout life, but 200,000 girls in 2,031 secondary schools have now become involved through the Youth Sport Trust/Nike *Girls in Sport* programme.

A total of 83% of the schools in the programme say that girls are participating more in sport; and 77% of girls are doing more sport in after-school clubs.

Links with the wider healthcare sector are also vital. The Government has already launched nine Local Exercise and Activity Pilots to give individuals 'leisure credits' to access forms of exercise of their choice.



Children's experience of PE and sport determines whether they continue to be physically active in later life

Melanie Johnson,
Public Health Minister



During 2004, improving the nation's diet will be high on my agenda, particularly in relation to tackling obesity. Later in the year,

we will be publishing the Department of Health led cross-Government *Food and Health Action Plan*.

The plan will address our diet at every stage of life, pulling together the issues that influence what we eat, from the way that food is produced, to access to healthier foods, and the information that people need to make healthy choices.

The plan will set out the role that we all have to play – in Government, industry, education, healthcare and as individuals.

Michael Lloyd, Assistant
Secretary, Professional
Advice, National Association
of Head Teachers



Head teachers and schools point out the virtues of healthy eating through social studies, physical education, science lessons and tutor periods. Their

advice can be specific: on the role of exercise, calories, fat, body mass indices, and lifestyles.

Head teachers and schools have to balance good advice on healthy diets with respect for the variety of shapes and sizes we meet in our pupils. There is only a certain amount of encouragement that can be given to adopt certain lifestyles.

The most effective education is to promote the positive benefits of exercise, academic study, risk awareness and self-confidence, rather than the negative effect of nagging about what foods are bad for you.

A view from Ofcom

At the end of 2003, Ofcom was established as the regulator for the UK communications industries, with responsibilities across television, radio, telecommunications and wireless communications services

The remit of Ofcom, the communications regulator, is 'to further the interests of citizen-consumers as the communications industries enter the digital age'.

To do this Ofcom shall:

- Balance the promotion of choice and competition with the duty to foster plurality, informed citizenship, protect viewers, listeners and customers and promote cultural diversity.

- Serve the interests of the citizen-consumer as the communications industry enters the digital age.

- Support the need for innovators, creators and investors to flourish within markets driven by full and fair competition between all providers.

- Encourage the evolution of electronic media and communications networks to the greater benefit of all who live in the United Kingdom.

In response to a letter from Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, about the rules relating to food and drink advertising to children on television, Ofcom Chief Executive Stephen Carter issued the following statement:

*Stephen Carter,
Chief Executive, Ofcom*



“ As you know, we are committed to bringing the best evidence to bear upon the way we regulate the industry. We share your view that child obesity is an important and urgent social issue, and we are therefore giving significant priority to a major project which will inform the best approach to take to any changes to the broadcast advertising codes. We aim to complete the project, including consulting on, and implementing any rule changes, during the first half of 2004.

Specifically, we will:

- conduct major new research into the impact of food promotion to children, talking not only to children but also to parents, teachers and other professionals. We will use a variety of research techniques as appropriate, and will also examine potential rule changes and their likely positive and negative impacts;

- in parallel with this assessment, examine and define the context of both the FSA's report and of the factors that have led to the issue being on the public agenda. This will include producing an overview of the market for food promotion to children, evaluating television's role in the total media landscape, and charting recent changes in family lifestyles;

- and conduct our own independent assessment of the FSA's 'Review of Research into the Effects of Food Promotion to Children', as well as the responses that have been made to it by the advertising industry and others. We expect to engage a leading academic with significant experience of research among young people for this assessment.

At the same time, we will be developing our overall strategy and priorities, including our Media Literacy responsibilities: we will consider how best the role of advertising to children and their understanding of it can be reflected in our early work programme.

Results from all these exercises will be drawn together to help Ofcom decide what specific action may be needed to address your concerns, and those of the FSA, in relation to broadcast advertising.

Naturally, we will keep you and your Department informed of progress, and will be happy to answer questions you may have on any aspect of this work. ”

What you can do: taking part in the debate through our website

You can watch the Food Promotion and Children public meeting live online on the Food Standards Agency's website: www.food.gov.uk

In addition to being webcast, the event is also being shown live on Sky Digital Channel 687.

Giving people the chance to watch online forms part of a package of measures aimed at ensuring as many people as possible can follow the debate and join in.

The Agency has also set up a designated Food Promotion and Children website:

www.food.gov.uk/promotion

It sets out clearly the various options that might be taken if the increasing problem of childhood obesity is to be tackled.

So far, hundreds of people have responded with their views by sending back the online feedback form. You can read a representative sample of their comments in the Have Your Say section.

To put the whole Food Promotion and Children issue into some sort of context, the site also includes a live feed of related news stories, sourced from across the Internet.

And there's a factfile that includes information ranging from child and adult obesity levels and the size of the UK snack food market, to how much TV children watch and how much (or little) fruit and veg they eat on average each day.

So why not make sure you have your say? Log on to the website and take part in the debate.

Sue Davies, Principal Policy Adviser, Consumers' Association



Our recent *Which?* report on School Dinners highlighted how poor many children's diets are. The health

implications can no longer be disputed and neither can the impact of marketing of foods high in fat, sugar and salt to children.

A wide range of methods are now used to target children – some explicit and others more covert. A broad range of policy measures are therefore needed to ensure a more responsible approach. This includes restrictions on TV advertising during children's viewing times based on how much fat, sugar and salt products contain, and criteria for the composition of food products specifically targeted at children.

Sylvia Jay, Director General of the Food and Drink Federation

There can be a tendency for debates such as this to become adversarial and for the private sector's contribution to be disregarded because of its commercial interests.

Obesity is a serious problem for society and the UK food industry wants to play its part. However, altering behaviour is not a simple task.

There are no quick fixes or single solutions, and any action will need to be approached on the basis of science-based evidence of what will work. It will also require government and all other stakeholders to work together with a commitment to achieving real results over the long term.



The screenshot shows the Food Standards Agency website page for 'Food promotion and children'. The page features a navigation menu on the left with options like 'Issues', 'Facts', 'Options', 'Have your say...', 'The debate', 'Read the review', 'FAQ', and 'PRINT FRIENDLY'. The main content area includes a search bar, a 'FOOD DIRECTORY A-Z', and a 'Did you know?' section. The central text discusses a public debate on 27 January, chaired by broadcaster Jeremy Vine, and mentions a wider discussion initiated by the Agency following a 2003 research review. It also highlights the role of food promotion in diet and health, noting that many children's diets contain more fat, sugar, and salt than recommended, and that obesity levels are rising. The page concludes with a commitment to helping people improve their dietary health and a note on the role of food promotion.

The FSA website: open to your views

Want to get on board?

Schools wishing to apply for a visit by the Cooking Bus can do so by completing a form available on the Agency's website (see Further information, below right). They will then receive a pack asking for more information about your school and the way food is taught there.

Schools will need to indicate areas of the curriculum in which they need support, as all of the activities on the Cooking Bus are planned with the bus's advisory teacher. The advisory teacher establishes a partnership with the school in the months before the visit. During that time the focus of each workshop, its duration, the practical content and the links with the curriculum are planned for each group of pupils.

Whatever the curriculum support asked for, all workshops contain the themes of safe food-handling skills, personal safety, knowledge of ingredients and nutrition. These relate to specific programmes of study within the curriculum in design and technology, science, history and geography.

Priority for the Agency's Cooking Bus is given to schools in low-income areas. But by filling in a form, available on the website (see Further information), schools will automatically register with Focus on Food, which runs a second Cooking Bus and will also be eligible for that bus.

Cooking Bus factfile

As the FSA's Cooking Bus builds up its mileage, it is expected notch-up some impressive statistics.

- The Cooking Bus will travel about 10,000 miles a year.
- More than 18,000 children and 2,400 teachers will be involved in Cooking Bus workshops during the next three years.
- Children and teachers will cook about 1,800 dishes per year.
- Workshops use about 4,000 kilograms of fruit and vegetables a year.
- Washing up takes place 30 times a week, about 1,350 times a year.
- The most popular recipes are: cornbread, fruit kebabs, fruit smoothies, vegetable soup, vegetable samosas and spring rolls.

This supplement was published by the Food Standards Agency in January 2004. For more about FSA News contact the editor at: frank.chalmers@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk To subscribe, contact Rusty Odihiri, tel: 020 7276 8830; email: rusty.odihiri@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk For more on the FSA go to: www.food.gov.uk

Food Standards Agency's Cooking Bus takes to the road

In November 2003 the Food Standards Agency's Cooking Bus was launched by Minister for Public Health Melanie Johnson and Agency Deputy Chair Julia Unwin.

Pupils and teachers from Southfield School in Hatfield joined in wishing the bus well as it started its journey to convey healthy eating and food safety messages to school children around the country.

The bus, which is staffed by two experienced teachers, offers practical support to schools, and will deliver improved food education to more than 18,000 pupils and 2,400 teachers over the next three years.

Through practical cooking sessions, children and young people will be inspired about food, cooking, healthy eating and food safety.

And teachers won't find themselves left out in the cold, as special workshops held on the bus will enable them to take the knowledge and experience they gain back to the classroom once the Cooking Bus has moved on, creating a legacy of improved food education.

Minister for Public Health Melanie Johnson, said: 'It's no secret that children are not eating enough healthy foods. Figures show that children spent £433m on food and drink going to and from school last year, most of it going on sweets, crisps, chocolate and fizzy drinks.'

One in seven 15 year olds and one in twelve 6 year olds are now obese.

'We're committed to encouraging children to eat a healthy, balanced diet and the Cooking Bus will play a key role in helping achieve that aim.'

'I'm delighted to launch the Cooking Bus and I'm sure that children and teachers will enjoy getting on board too!'

The Agency Cooking Bus will prioritise visits to socially deprived areas of the country. In the school holidays the bus will embark on a special programme of visits to community centres, youth clubs and play schemes to make learning about food more accessible.

Julia Unwin, Deputy Chair of the Food Standards Agency, said: 'The Cooking Bus is integral to the Agency's campaign to reach out and engage with many different groups of people to help improve their diets.'

'The Cooking Bus, will be targeting young people and will help to develop crucial life skills and encourage good hygiene practice in the kitchen.'

Further information

To find out more about the Cooking Bus's timetable go to:

www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/bus/timetable/#h_3 To apply for the Cooking Bus to visit your school, register at: www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating/bus/catchbus/#



Minister for Public Health Melanie Johnson (pictured right) and Food Standards Agency Deputy Chair Julia Unwin (left) in front of the Food Standards Agency's Cooking Bus with pupils and teachers from Southfield School in Hatfield

FSA drive to reduce people's salt intake is extended to cover children

The Food Standards Agency's drive to reduce people's salt intake was reflected in numerous initiatives during 2003, including the setting of new daily intake targets for children for the first time.

The advice, issued in May, was based on a report from the Standing Advisory Committee on nutrition (SACN), an independent expert advisory committee.

The targets ranged from less than 1g/day for children aged 0-6 months to 6g/day for those aged 11-14.

The SACN report reiterated previous advice that reducing current daily adult salt consumption from about 9g to 6g would lead to a fall in average population blood pressure levels.

Also in May, the Agency asked public sector caterers to reduce the amount of salt used in their food production and supplies of processed foods. About three-quarters of the salt we eat is from processed food.

It also convened a meeting of stakeholders to discuss possible Government action to

reduce salt intakes. Ideas suggested included the possibility of compositional criteria (such as salt limits) for processed foods either on a statutory basis or by voluntary agreement.

Discussions with the food industry to encourage and agree salt reduction strategies are ongoing.

An Agency survey published in June 2003 found that many popular ready meals are very high in salt. One meal in the sample contained 98.3% of a whole day's salt quota of 6g.

A second survey, published in September, found that standard pork sausages on sale in the UK contain more salt now than they did 12 years ago, up from 2.2g to 2.4g per portion since 1991.

The survey found that the amount of salt in some sausages had reduced since the last survey. However, all of the sausages surveyed still contained too much salt.



Further information

For more details go to: www.food.gov.uk/

FSA Board recommends Ministers replace OTM rule with BSE testing

At its July meeting, the FSA Board agreed to recommend to Ministers that it would be acceptable on public health grounds to replace the Over Thirty Months (OTM) rule with BSE testing of cattle older than thirty months in two stages.

The Board decision was taken after a year-long review of the OTM rule, a 12-week public consultation on the review, a programme of stakeholder meetings, risk assessments, and a public meeting organised to discuss issues raised in the review.

The Board recommended to Ministers that cattle born after August 1996 could be allowed into the food chain, after being tested and found negative for BSE, at the earliest from January 2004, with the possibility of complete replacement of the rule from July 2005.

It said that because of the need for effective implementation of the proposed changes, Ministers should not change the OTM rule until they

were satisfied that the necessary preparations had been made by the relevant Government departments, industry and other agencies throughout the UK.

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is responsible for taking these arrangements forward.

The OTM rule on UK beef and imports remains in force until any changes are implemented.

The other main controls should remain unchanged, the Board recommended. These are the Specified Risk Material (SRM) control, which removes 99% of any infectivity that may be present in cattle, and the ban on feeding meat-and-bone meal to cattle.

Further information

Answers to common questions on the OTM review are at: www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/meat/otmreview/otm_faq/
The full Board paper is at: www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/fsa030702.pdf

Themes of the year

FSA News continued to publish special themed supplements illustrating the activities of the FSA in its widest sense.

In March 2003, 'Food law enforcement – a matter of priority' highlighted the breadth of work undertaken by the Agency's food law enforcement branch, and in June, we published our regular 'A-Z of who to contact in the Agency'.

In July, 'Putting the consumer first', highlighted the work of the Agency's Consumer Branch, and in October, we looked at 'Science and research: providing a foundation for Agency policy'.

Further information

Past issues of *FSA News* are at: www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/publications/fsanews

FSA Wales launches nine-point nutrition plan

A 'Food and Well Being' strategy, aimed at improving the health of people in Wales through nutrition, was launched by the Welsh Assembly Government on 13 February 2003.

The strategy, developed by FSA Wales in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government and other keystakeholders, outlines the actions required by key players to improve the overall diet of people in Wales.

The main priority groups are low income and vulnerable consumers – including older people and minority ethnic groups – as well as infants, children and young people, middle-aged men and women of childbearing age.

Further information

The strategy is at: www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/foodandwellbeing.pdf

Eat Safe Award takes off in Northern Ireland

Last summer FSA Northern Ireland launched the Eat Safe Award scheme, aimed at helping consumers identify a 'spotless catering establishment – for breakfast, lunch or dinner'.

All of Northern Ireland's 26 local councils gave their backing to the scheme, and consumer organisations and trade bodies came on board to help roll it out across the province.

By the end of November, 20 restaurants from across Northern Ireland had achieved the Award.

Further information

More details are available at: www.food.gov.uk/northernireland/eatsafe/

From restaurant to central Government

The Food Standards Agency has launched a scheme to enable student environmental health officers employed by local authorities to spend some of their practical 'placement' year with Government departments. FSA News talks to the first student EHO to take part

It's not unusual for a third year student environmental health officer (EHO) to begin his or her practical training 'placement' year by spending time in a restaurant monitoring storage temperatures for cream cakes or even visiting a dock-complex to check for rat infestation.

But not many can expect within days to be attending meetings of the FSA's national Outbreak Control Team tracing salmonella in retail sandwiches, or be reading policy guidance being developed by the Agency to assist EHOs inspecting ships and 'planes.

Yet this is exactly what student EHO Jennifer Pays was able to do last autumn as the first person to take part in a scheme for EHO students organised and funded by the Food Standards Agency.

Jennifer, who is a third year student EHO at the University of the West of England, Bristol, joined the FSA on 6 October 2003 for six weeks, after working for a few days with Bristol City Council's

Student EHO Jennifer Pays: 'The course has been really valuable in giving me the tools to be able to go out and do inspections'

environmental health department 'to ease her in'.

At the FSA, she spent most time with staff from the Agency's Local Authority Enforcement Division, which provides advice and guidance for local authorities.

'I found it really interesting to see how Food Standards Agency guidance is developed. It was very useful for me, because at the end of the day I'm going to be one of the people who has to deliver it,' she says.

'I was surprised at the length of time that it takes to develop policy, but it was comforting to know that so many branches within the FSA actually have input, which is something I didn't

'The training I received at the FSA has been really valuable in giving me the tools to be able to go out and do inspections... It's given me a real insight into the policies and legislation available to EHOs'

realise before I started at the FSA.'

In addition to sitting in on meetings and shadowing staff, Jennifer was expected to read up on what was going on, and ask questions from an environmental health perspective. 'Any questions I asked were always answered thoroughly,' she says.

One area that she found particularly interesting was the work then under way on the development of the Illegal Meat Task Force, which the Agency was setting up to support local authorities combating meat fraud.

'I think it's great - pooling financial resources and sending in experts to back up local authorities,' she says. 'Especially if it's a small local authority that doesn't have the designated resources for this specific task.'

She also enjoyed her time with the FSA's Outbreak Control Team, which was involved in monitoring and tracing outbreaks of salmonella, and at the Meat Hygiene Service in York, where she found it encouraging to discover that so many people who had trained as EHOs were in such 'diverse areas of work'.

Working with the Food Incidents Branch was also useful, especially seeing how food hazard warnings are developed. 'Being an EHO, I would quite possibly receive one of these

through from the Agency,' she says. 'I did some work with the branch for a couple of days when they were mainly concentrating on Sudan I - the illegal food dye that has been discovered in some foods on sale in the UK.

'The training I received at the FSA has been really valuable in giving me the tools to be able to go out and do inspections.

'It's given me a real insight into the policies and legislation available to EHOs, and also into the amount of support that can be provided by central Government to local authorities. I didn't realise that the link was so strong. I think that it's important for local authorities to use central Government departments for advice.

'I consider this to be a fantastic scheme. It gives you a very mature outlook on policies and regulations. And that's important, as they are the tools of our trade. I just hope that it is something that other students can benefit from, because it's been an experience of a lifetime.'

Ann Goodwin, Head of the FSA's Local Authority Enforcement Division, said: 'This is the first time Government departments have come together to provide practical training for student EHOs. We are delighted that Jennifer Pays found the experience so rewarding, and we look forward to our second student, Adeshola Awomolo from Tower Hamlets, who will be arriving on 8 March 2004.'

■ Jennifer is now on placement at Defra and will move on to the Health and Safety Executive before returning to spend six months with Bristol City Council.

The lack of practical training placements for student Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) is thought to contribute significantly to the poor level of EHO recruitment in some local authorities.

In partnership with the HSE and Defra, the FSA has agreed a pilot scheme, initially for one year, to help increase the present low number of paid EHO student placements.

The Agency has launched the scheme and is contributing to the costs of a small number of paid placements and, along with Defra and the HSE, is providing training opportunities in central Government.

Final Reports of Completed Research Projects

Copies of the following final research reports have been placed in the Food Standards Agency's Library & Information Service (LIS). The reports may be viewed at the LIS, or a copy obtained for a handling fee of £10 (for individuals) or £15 (for institutions), which includes post and packaging. Please make cheques payable to the Food Standards Agency.

Further information

Contact Dr John Dixon, Assistant Librarian, Food Standards Agency, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH, tel: 020 7276 8060; email: john.dixon@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

For technical information please get in touch with the contacts shown below each finalised report.

Project
A03023 (FS2252)

Title
Approaches to assess risk and assign priorities to chemicals used to make food contact materials

This project showed that when assessing consumer exposure, there is no generally acceptable alternative to conducting food surveys. The feasibility of providing a structured approach to estimating potential exposure to chemicals migrating from food contact materials has been assessed. The approach used progressively refined assumptions, calculations and finally actual migration, usage and food consumption data where available.

Further information

Contact Dr Karen Barnes, tel: 020 7276 8541; email: karen.barnes@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Project
A03037 (Update)

Title
LC-MS method development for the screening of non-volatile and polar compounds present in paper and board or plastic food contact materials and articles

A qualitative method has been developed for the analysis of semicarbazide (SEM). This method does not involve acid

hydrolysis or derivatisation. The method has found SEM as an impurity in the chemicals azodicarbonamide, biurea and urazole. There was reasonable agreement between the levels determined with or without chemical derivatisation. This work was reproduced at a second laboratory. Quantitative results by the new and old methodology were more difficult to reproduce between laboratories than qualitative analysis.

Further information

Contact Karen Barnes, tel: 020 7276 8541; email: karen.barnes@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Project
A03035

Title
The effects of storage, temperature, damage and cooking on the migration of bisphenol A from can coatings

This project assessed whether extended storage times or damage to cans influences the migration of bisphenol A (BPA) from can coatings to food. The work also investigated if levels of migration of BPA to foodstuffs, were higher when food was cooked in the can. There was no increase in BPA migration associated with heating food in the can, from damage or from extended storage of the cans.

Further information

Contact Dr Paul Willetts, tel: 020 7276 8540; email: paul.willetts@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Project
A01028

Title
Use of immunoaffinity techniques and existing antibodies to develop validated extraction methods for polysaccharide additives in foodstuffs

The aim of this project was to characterise a number of antibodies to gum arabic (for example, gums of different species and sub species of *Acacia senegal* and *Acacia seyal*) that had been produced in previous Agency-funded work. The specificities, relative affinities and cross reactivities of the antibodies with gum arabic and other food ingredients were determined using an ELISA method. It was concluded that given the lack of specificity of a number

of the antibodies towards *Acacia senegal* or *Acacia seyal*, and their cross reactivity with other food grade gums, none of these antibodies would be suitable for developing as the basis of an immunoaffinity assay. Additionally, the inherent variability of the epitopes present in different commercial gum samples meant that it would be impossible to develop a robust assay which would give a quantitative estimate of gum arabic in a complex food matrix. The project did however demonstrate that ELISA is a sensitive and reliable method for analysing gums.

Further information

Contact: Wendy Dixon, tel: 020 7276 8587; wendy.dixon@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Project
T07005

Title
The effect of exposure to food protein via maternal sources in the development of food allergy in infants with a family history of atopy

The aim of this project was to examine whether exclusion of dietary food allergens throughout pregnancy and lactation could lead to a reduced risk of development of allergic disease in infants born to allergic parents. Mothers with a family history of allergy were randomised into two groups (control and egg exclusion diet). They were given dietary advice on healthy eating during pregnancy. The egg avoidance mothers also received advice on egg avoidance. Both groups were given identical weaning advice, and infants were assessed at various ages. Tests were carried out to determine the level of the egg allergen ovalbumin in various body fluids. Results showed that egg intake was low in both groups. The researchers noted that dietary avoidance of egg is hard to achieve. Egg intake was low in both groups, so it was not possible to draw any conclusions about the effect of high egg intake on the development of infant atopy. They conclude that their results demonstrate that there is not an all-encompassing panacea for the prevention of allergy, but that some prevention measures may have their place in certain population sub-groups.

Further information

Contact Ruth Dadswell, tel: 020 7276 8516; email: ruth.dadswell@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

'May contain' consultation launched

The Agency has launched a consultation on the use of alternative phrases to the words 'may contain' on food labels.

The phrase is often used on pre-packaged food to indicate the possible presence of ingredients, such as peanuts, to which people may be allergic.

Consumers have raised concerns that the phrase is overused and can restrict choice. There are also concerns that its unnecessary use on certain products undermines valid warnings.

The Agency is consulting on the following alternative phrases:

- Not suitable for peanut/nut/sesame allergic consumers
- Not suitable for people with peanut/nut/sesame allergy

Following the consultation, the most appropriate alternative phrase will be inserted into the Agency's Clear Labelling Advice.

Although it is not a legal requirement for manufacturers to label in this way, where labelling of this sort is used, manufacturers will be encouraged to use the appropriate phrases in the future.

Further information

The consultation for England is at: www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/Consultations/consulteng/maycontainconsulteng The Scottish consultation is at: www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/Consultations/consultscot/maycontainscotland

Draft guidance for local authorities in Great Britain on imported food and feed controls

Comments are being sought on draft guidance for local authorities on the level and type of activity needed to achieve effective and consistent enforcement of imported food and feed.

Following the Government report on the organisation of import controls, the FSA was asked to secure a step-change improvement in the co-ordination and delivery of local authority inspection of imported foodstuffs and animal products by 31 March 2004.

To achieve the step-change, the Agency is taking forward a range of initiatives, many aimed at providing more information to enforcement bodies.

The guidance is intended for use by

port health officers, environmental health officers and food standards officers in local authorities and at ports in Great Britain. It does not cover Northern Ireland.

The guidance incorporates relevant standards from the national port benchmarking exercise and the Food Standards Agency's Local Authority Resource Pack on Imported Food Control (available in the Enforcement section under Imports).

Further information

The Guidance for local authorities in Great Britain on food imports is at: www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/guidance_imp_food.pdf

ACAF Report on on-farm feeding practices

The Advisory Committee on Animal Feedings (ACAF) has reported on its Review of On-farm Feeding Practices.

This review arose from discussions with stakeholders at the Committee's Open Forum in Manchester July 2001. The report aims to increase awareness of hazards to feed and food safety amongst the farming community and other stakeholders, and makes recommendations on 'best practice' for all farmers and their advisers.

In its report the Committee advocates the adoption by farmers of arrangements based on recognised risk management approaches and also recognises the usefulness of codes of practice and assurance schemes devised by the farming, food and feed industries.

It recommends that these should be

further developed where necessary, to address the particular hazards associated with on-farm mixing and feeding.

Officials from the Agency's Animal Feed Unit will be hosting meetings with farming organisations in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in the next few months in order to draw the Committee's report, recommendations and detailed annexes to the attention of relevant interests. They will also be asking for feedback, especially in relation to the usefulness and proportionality of the Committee's views.

Further information

The full report is available at: www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/farm.pdf Alternatively contact the ACAF Secretariat, tel: 020 7276 8083

Consumer Committee member

Lindsey Kearton, a Senior Policy Officer for the Welsh Consumer Council (WCC) was appointed to the Agency's Consumer Committee at its 16 December meeting. She is responsible for the WCC's programme of work on food and health issues.

ACAF vacancies

Four vacancies will arise shortly on the Advisory Committee on Animal Feedings (ACAF) for members with expertise/experience in either the animal feed industry, feed law enforcement or novel technology and for a lay person. ACAF advises the Agency and Ministers on the safety and use of animal feeds and feeding practices, with particular emphasis on protecting human health.

Application are needed by 19 February.

Further information

Contact Raj Pal, tel: 020 7276 8083; email: raj.pal@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

New VRC members needed

New members are needed for the Veterinary Residues Committee (VRC), an independent committee that advises the FSA and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate on veterinary residues surveillance programmes and the significance of the results for consumers.

The committee is looking for qualified people with relevant experience in: chairing advisory committees; consumer issues; toxicology; veterinary surgery with experience of farming/animal husbandry; retail industry.

Completed applications must be submitted by 23 April 2004.

Further information

For an information pack and application form contact Colin Bennett, tel: 01932 338490; fax: 01932 336618; email: c.bennett@vmd.defra.gsi.gov.uk More on the work of the VRC is at: www.vet-residues-committee.gov.co.uk

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