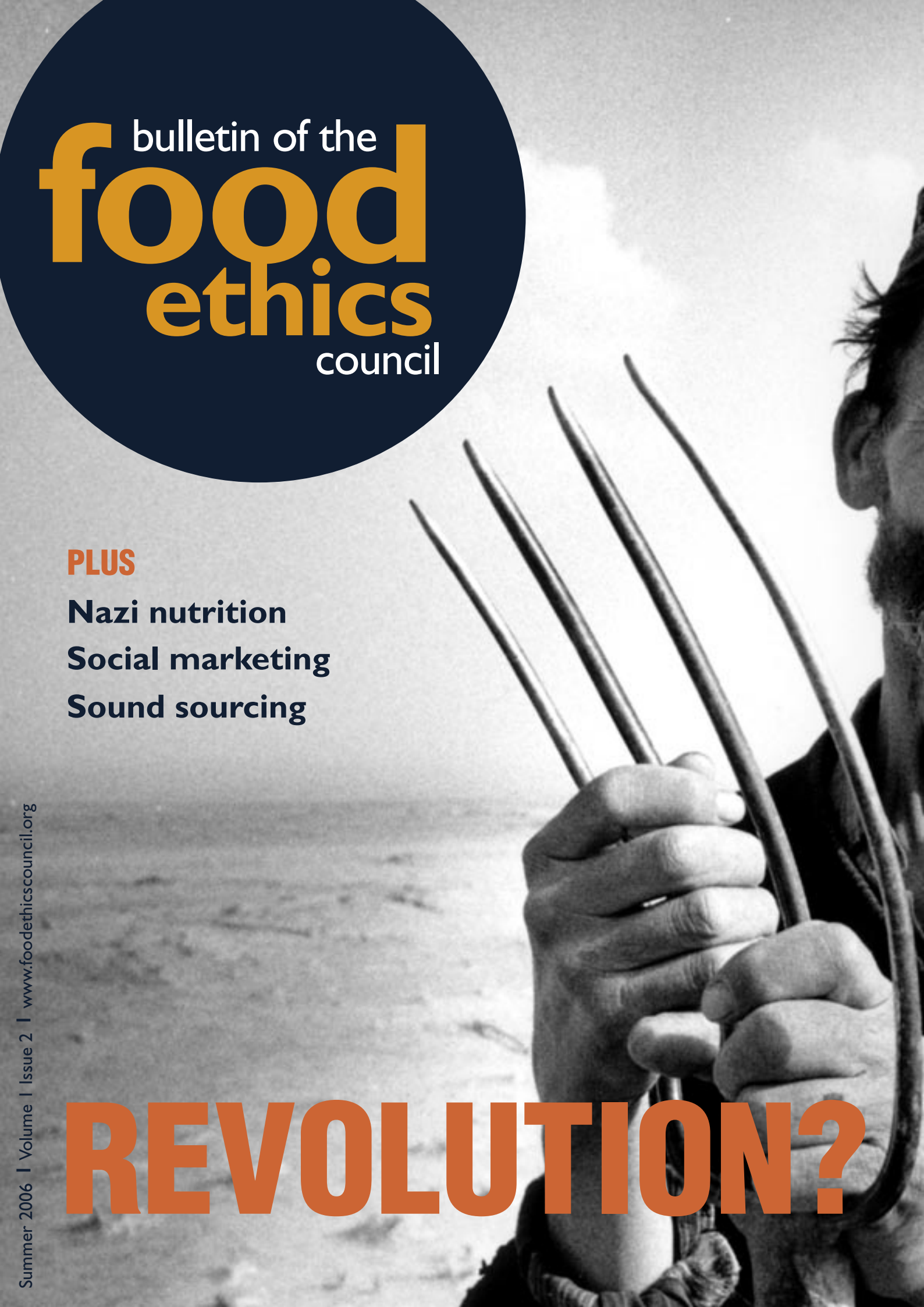
bulletin of the
food ethics council



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REVOLUTION?

Summer 2006 | Volume I | Issue 2 | www.foodethicscouncil.org

From the editor

Revolution is as dear to business and science as it is to radical politics. Indeed perhaps more than ever – as new fields like nanotechnology and nutrigenomics vie for attention and support – we associate revolutionary rhetoric with the white-coated technician or the maverick entrepreneur, rather than with the agitator. Heavy corporate investment coupled with high-profile risks around food safety, public health and the environment have raised the stakes in food and farming, making the hunt for the next big thing, or magic bullet, more frenetic than ever.

In this issue we hear about revolutions and counter-revolutions in technology, business, policy and society at large. We hear how some have happened, or are under way, and about the consequences. We hear that others are not happening, against rumour or expectation. And we hear where 'revolutions' of some kind are needed, or what ought to happen instead.

The 'Revolution?' theme is a thread that runs through many of the articles in this bulletin, but not all. In a change from the first issue, we have decided not to group the themed articles together. We now also distinguish between three main styles of article, namely columns, features and analysis.

A further development is that we are publishing an article written in response to a piece from the last issue. Hugh Raven, from Soil Association Scotland, replies to Michele Field's previous article on the ethics of organic fish farming.

If you would like to respond to any of the articles in this issue, please let me know. We can only publish a limited number of articles 'in response', so please get in touch before putting pen to paper. Equally, if you have something shorter to say about any of the articles or about the bulletin as a whole, please do write us a letter or email – we are keen to include a letters page soon.

Tom MacMillan
tom@foodethicscouncil.org

The Bulletin of the Food Ethics Council seeks to challenge accepted opinion and spark fruitful debate about key issues and developments in food and farming. Distributed quarterly to subscribers, each issue features news and analysis from people actively involved in producing food and shaping policy.

The Food Ethics Council challenges government, business and the public to tackle problems in food and farming ethically, providing research, analysis and tools to help. The views of contributors to this bulletin are not necessarily those of the Food Ethics Council or its members.

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Food Ethics Council
39 – 41 Surrey Street
Brighton BN1 3PB UK

T: 0845 345 8574
or +44 (0) 1273 766 654
F: +44 (0) 1273 766 653

info@foodethicscouncil.org
www.foodethicscouncil.org

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Revolution?

No, but it is time for a renaissance

THE BIG IDEA

Colin Tudge

Colin Tudge's latest book on the state of the worlds' food, *So shall we reap*, is available in paperback from Penguin.
He is a member of the Food Ethics Council.

The world is in a huge, horrible, and possibly terminal mess. The United Nations reports a billion undernourished, a billion overnourished (soon the world's population of diabetics will exceed that of the current United States), a billion in slums, a billion on less than a dollar a day – all out of a world total of 6.4 billion. And the world will soon start running out of oil. And meanwhile power is shifting by the day from west to east – which is not bad in itself but will certainly be hugely disruptive in ways that are unpredictable. And overall, there is global warming.

Worst of all though, by far, is that the powers-that-be – powerful governments like Bush's and Blair's, the corporates from whom they are increasingly indistinguishable, and the battalions of experts and intellectuals who advise them (scientists and MBAs and economists and accountants and lawyers) – are convinced they have got the right answers, and that all the world needs is more of the same. They are not going to change their ways or even consider the possibility that serious change is necessary. As that joke magazine *The Economist* said on its cover recently – "Why globalization is hurting – and why we need more of it!".

So what's to be done? Theoretically, there are three possible ways to change the status quo:

The first is by Reform. This is almost a complete waste of time but not quite. Some politicians and executives are both nice and intelligent and do listen – but they usually can't do much anyway. A lady from a substantial supermarket told me recently that she wanted her company to behave better, but it couldn't because it had to compete with another (which she named) that was even more substantial, and less scrupulous. More to the point: reform implies incremental change and there is no plausible route by which major food processors (say) can transform incrementally into institutions that truly assist local food production. Reform is not a total waste of time, however, because consumers also need to change – their buying habits and their attitudes. Habits and attitudes can be changed incrementally.

The second possible route is by Revolution. This is not going to happen and if it did it would not be good. At this stage of history, revolution would merely add to the world's ills. Ad hoc disruption is worthwhile, however. I am sure the protestors were right to pull up GM crops (and to call this terrorism as some have done is a serious debasement of language, of the kind that alas is now typical).

The route that can work – and the one I urge we should go for with all haste – is Renaissance. Just start doing good things instead – buy local produce, so that local farmers stay in business; cook traditionally; do any and all of the things that could feed all of us well and keep the world as a whole in good heart. In fact, strive to support, improve, or in many cases resurrect all those crafts and patterns of trading that are being systematically wiped out by industrialised agri-business and by the food industry – a wholly destructive process that in turn is systematically subsidised by governments, with our money. This is what renaissance means – just building something afresh, without stopping to re-design the status quo. At the same time, ignore the powers that be. Shun their stores, packed with goods unethically acquired. Ignore, where necessary, their stupid rules, on who can sell what to whom. Leave the nonsense to wither on the vine.

In truth, Renaissance is already in train. Worldwide, many thousands of farmers and small bakers and brewers and cooks, and millions of consumers, and quite a few intellectuals (including some scientists and economists and so on) are working on benign and sustainable methods of farming and distribution, and the necessary infrastructures of alternative economics and land reform. The requirement now is to bring all these initiatives together truly to create a worldwide movement with the impetus to supersede the present-day powers-that-be – yet designed in Abraham Lincoln's words by the people and for the people, and certainly owned by the people. To this end I am proposing to set up a forum and exchange for people who give a damn, called the Worldwide Food Club, linked to the Pari Center for New Learning in Tuscany – a fitting locale for Renaissance! I hope to have more to report in future bulletins.

David Goodman

David Goodman is Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. hatters@ucsc.edu

Analysis: industrial organics

The corporate counter-revolution in organic foods

In his book *Appetite for change* (1989), Warren Belasco wrote about the impacts on the US food industry of the counter-cultural, back-to-the-land movement of hippies, beatniks, and peaceniks, which gave rise in the 1970s to organic agriculture, urban food cooperatives and natural food stores. Belasco detailed the 'counter-revolutionary' strategies adopted by oligopolistic agri-business and retail giants to co-opt and dilute the powerful vision of alternative nature-society relations embedded in the practices of sustainable agriculture and local food networks. These strategies focused on 'repositioning' highly-processed industrial foods as 'natural' and 'healthy,' manufactured to have low fat, low cholesterol and high fibre content. The current obesity pandemic bears witness to the hollowness of this re-labeling exercise and media blitz.

However, this counter-revolution also marshals more direct, though equally corrosive, tactics to domesticate the radical spirits of alternative agriculture activists today. With annual sales now approaching US $15 billion and annual growth of 20 per cent, organic foods are rapidly shedding their 'niche market' status and entering the mainstream.

As major agro-industrial corporations and retailers 'follow the green' and compete for market share in this dynamic sector of the otherwise moribund US food industry, the organic food supply chain is rapidly being transformed into the mirror-image of its highly concentrated, conventional counterpart. Deploying merger and acquisition, the classic counter-revolutionary stratagems of corporate homogenization, household name US food conglomerates, like Heinz, ConAgra, General Mills, and Philip Morris Kraft, are gaining dominance in the processing branches of this supply chain.

In turn, these corporations require increasingly large consignments of farm produce as through-put for their processing plants and to stock supermarket shelves. Such industrial scale requirements are provoking land consolidation, the spread of contract farming, and monocultural organic production. This corporate take-over of organic foods is leading to what Michael Pollan, in *The omnivore's dilemma* (2006), calls 'industrial organics.'

Evidence of the corporate face of US organics and the concomitant processes of consolidation, market concentration and brand proliferation is now commonplace. At the farm level, competitive pressures to 'get big or get out' are intensifying, forcing smaller farmers to become contract outgrowers for big shipper-processors or seek refuge in forms of direct selling, such as farmers' markets, box schemes, and supplying high-end restaurants. The scale of the processes at work is exemplified by Earthbound Farm, established in 1984 by two University of California graduates, who began by selling plastic bags of salad mix or 'yuppie chow,' and which has grown into the largest organic grower-shipper in the US. With annual sales of $450 million, its salad greens are marketed under its 'Natural Selection' brand or as own-label produce by major supermarkets, such as Safeway and Trader Joe's, and 'big box' retailers like Costco. Earthbound Farm has 26,000 acres under organic crops, including operations in five Western states, and overseas in Canada, Mexico, Chile, and New Zealand.

Further illustrations of the corporate take-over of US organics include Dean Foods, the owner of not only Horizon, which accounts for 50-60 per cent of the US organic milk market, but also of the Rachel's brand in the UK. Horizon has many contract suppliers, but these include huge confinement feedlot dairies in California and Idaho, the very antithesis of the organic vision of mixed farming and ethical animal husbandry. At the retail end, the organic supermarket chain, Whole Foods, has become a Fortune 500 company with 175 stores, in part by acquiring food coops and natural food stores. Conventional supermarkets also are developing new organic brands, such as Safeway's 'O Organics' line of over 150 products, which recalls Sainsbury's recently introduced 'SO: Sainsbury's Organic' brand.

In this cutthroat climate, there is precious little room for the holistic small-scale farming practices and ethic of environmental stewardship that originally enthralled the ragtag band of counter-culture pioneers in the 1970s. Similar 'mainstreaming' processes are well-advanced in the UK, where retail multiples account for a staggering 75 per cent of organic sales. Transnational food processors and distributors, including M&M Mars and Hain Celestial Group, are firmly established and Whole Foods recently purchased the Fresh & Wild chain.

As in the US, resistance to this corporate counter-revolution and the subversion of the organic vision has already been forced to the margins. Its future is bound up with direct selling, localism, public procurement policies, and efforts to combine environmental stewardship with the 'moral charge' of Fair Trade in a wider concept of ethical food consumption.

In response

Hugh Raven, Director of Soil Association Scotland, responds to Michele Field's article on 'Fish farming's ethical hitches'

Fish farming's ethical hitches
In the Spring '06 issue (p.8) Michele Field wrote of organic fish farming: "the Soil Association is being deeply compromised, misleading the public who think they can trust its certifications".

If you want to respond to one of this bulletin's contributors, please contact the editor. We can only publish a limited number of replies.

Michele Field's article on the Soil Association's standards for sustainable aquaculture demands a response; I'm grateful to the editor for allowing me the space to provide it.

The arguments cited from our critics appear twofold: that we certify the production of carnivorous fish, and that their diets are based on fish meal and fish oil of dubious sustainability.

We can agree on one thing: these are indeed important issues.

Salmon and trout are carnivorous: of that there is no doubt. In the wild they eat a variety of organisms, including other fish. Some critics claim it is impossible to farm a carnivore sustainably. That is wildly over-simplistic.

Forgive the catechismal style, but I think this fallacy is best exploded by a series of questions. Will humans continue to catch and eat wild fish? Yes, almost certainly. Most of us think it's desirable that they should. Will humans then consume 100% of the fish that they have caught – gills, guts and gonads? No they will not. So there will be fish waste. How should it be disposed of – through landfill, fed to pigs and poultry (which then taste of fish), or turned back into high quality fish for human consumption? Most sensible people, in our view, would choose the latter. That is exactly what we do with organic standards for salmon. Is it really so crazy to farm carnivorous fish, when they are fed on what would otherwise be a waste product? We don't think so.

All the fishmeal in Soil Association certified diets comes from this source. Charles Clover complains that wild fish are pulped to feed to farmed ones. In a sense, I suppose they are – but the ones we use have previously had the edible parts removed for human consumption. We don't allow the use of industrial feed fisheries, precisely because we have long shared Charles's concern that they are not sustainable.

The other critique relates to the oil in the fish feeds we certify. There is sufficient oil from the offcuts of fish processed for human consumption to more than fulfil the needs of Scotland's small organic salmon farming sector. But we think we can do still better – which is why we have initiated a groundbreaking partnership with the Marine Stewardship Council, Aquascot, and Waitrose. This aims to ensure that by 2010, all fish oil included in Soil Association approved diets is independently certified as sustainable.

Is this position such an affront to sustainability, as Michele's piece alleges, to be "the Achilles heel of the Soil Association"? We don't think many reasonable people would say so.

I have some questions in return for the critics who would see us pull out of this area. The United Nations projects that over the next 25 years fish farming will overtake wild-capture fisheries in the food it yields for human consumption. Despite this, do our critics really think that fish farming will just go away? Assuming they don't, do they agree it should be made more sustainable? I imagine they do. If these assumptions are correct, I'm baffled by their criticisms – since no organisation in the world is doing more to address precisely the issues they identify than the Soil Association.

Is it really so crazy to farm carnivorous fish, when they are fed on what would otherwise be a waste product?

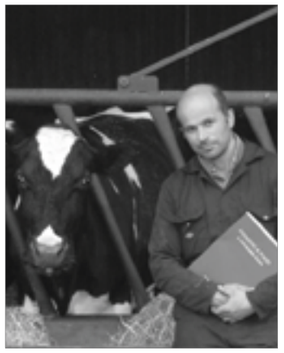
Don't take my word for it. The leading international fisheries news service, the online 24-hour global newsletter Intrafish, in March called our endeavours "the first major effort to address the sustainability of feed-grade fisheries". Is it really sensible that we should stop? Come off it.

You quote Charles saying "I personally don't see the virtue in buying organic salmon at all". Could this be the same Charles Clover who wrote in The Daily Telegraph on 14th April that organic standards are "head and shoulders ahead of the pack"? Charles is an old friend of mine, and I'm sure he'll take this in the spirit in which it is intended: please, Charles, abandon this erratic orbit, and re-join the rest of us in the real world.

Curry or counselling?

What will it take to get farmers working together?

ON THE FARM



John Turner

John Turner is a farmer from near Stamford in Lincolnshire, where he runs a 100 hectare mixed farm together with his brother and parents. He was a founding member of FARM.
john.turner@farm.org.uk

More than four years have passed since the Curry Commission reported on the future of food and farming in the wake of Foot and Mouth Disease. The government strategy that followed tried to build on the strengths of English farming, and to prepare it for a future of more frugal public support. In many ways the Curry Commission and the strategy got it right – farming does need to become more dynamic and less dependent on public support. What strikes me, though, looking back over the changes that have swept through farming since 2002, is how they have been driven by legislation and financial penalties that seem a far cry from the new ethos Curry sought to encourage. If farmers haven't generally embraced and cultivated change as an opportunity, as Curry had hoped, what's stopped us?

The same week that the government's strategy was published, I got something of an answer. I found myself at a local farm sale, reflecting not on the talk of sweeping environmental reform and the generous expectations placed upon an underpowered 'Red Tractor' assurance label, but on the difficulty that we as farmers were likely to experience in taking even the first faltering steps along Curry's path of reform.

I was at the sale to find some feed barriers to convert one of our sheds into a 'maternity unit' for expectant cows. In the preceding weeks, calls to local suppliers had led to the inescapable conclusion that the nice shiny new galvanised ones we wanted were going to cost £325 each, which, needing six, put them well beyond our limited budget. Plan B was to find some used ones and the sale catalogue had listed exactly what we needed. Hopes of a bargain were soon dashed since the barriers in question were barely distinguishable from the piles of scrap in the adjoining lots.

Curry could have written a whole chapter about the events that ensued. Undeterred by the sorry state of the barriers, five or six farmers began a battle for their ownership. The victor emerged worse off by £395, plus a 5% buyer's commission, paying almost £90 more than the price of new! These farmers aren't stupid– I know some of them personally to be astute and capable – and this episode is hardly unusual. But it doesn't take a government Commission to point out the obvious – that instead of becoming blinded by their individual needs, those farmers should have combined their buying power to negotiate a much better deal – each could have had some new equipment for less than they seemed prepared to pay for badly damaged second-hand.

The reason such common sense didn't prevail lies in a deep-rooted perception that co-operation signals weakness and means a loss of independence. There is also an underlying mistrust that despite the best intentions, there will always be someone within any collaborative group who will use the opportunity to feather their own nest at the others' expense.

If we want farming to continue, and to become less dependent on public funds, we need to encourage farmers to help each other. The current subsidy system – where production-related subsidies have given way to a system in which farmers have to do little or nothing to receive their Single Farm Payment – cannot be justified as anything more than a brief transitional step towards a more effective use of public money. Of the many areas where support could be targeted to encourage good farming practice, none can be more urgent than laying the foundations for smaller farms – the majority – to become viable in the free market economy they'll face. This means co-operation, a notion English farmers seem instinctively to mistrust. We need to overcome this prejudice and actively encourage farmers to work together, strengthening the sector against big business tactics that 'divide and rule', if we are to make our first big strides along the road to recovery that Curry mapped out.

The Green Revolution

It was a coup for agricultural scientists, but they still have much to learn from the farming know-how they usurped

LETTER FROM INDIA

Devinder Sharma

Agricultural scientists have now realised that chemical pesticides were not necessary. They have recognised the grave mistake only after poisoning the lands, contaminating the ground water, polluting the environment, and killing thousands of farmers and farm workers.

The blunder of the Green Revolution could have been easily avoided if only the scientists had listened to farmers.

Rice farmers in Central Luzon province in the Philippines had gradually got disenchanted with the indiscriminate use of pesticides. From a peak insecticide use in the mid-1980s, they have now brought it down to an historic low. Contrary to what agricultural scientists and the chemical industry had maintained all these years, the decline in insecticide use has been accompanied by an increase in productivity from an average of 2.75 tonnes to 3.25 tonnes per hectare in 2002. It also resulted in savings on average of up to 1,000 pesos per hectare.[1]

Not only in the Philippines, but in several other countries, farmers have proved the scientists wrong. Some 2,000 poor rice farmers in Bangladesh, whose average farm income is around Rs 4,000 per year, suddenly donned the robe of agricultural scientist. In two years they have proved the agricultural scientists completely wrong. Senior scientist at the International Rice Research Institute, Manila, in the Philippines, Gary John, was quoted as saying: "To my surprise when people stopped spraying, yields didn't drop – and this was across 600 fields in two different districts over 4 seasons. I'm convinced that the vast majority of insecticides that rice farmers use are a complete waste of time and money." [2]

What's more, in less than a decade, IRRI believes that most of Bangladesh's 11.8 million rice farmers will have stopped using insecticides. In Vietnam, almost 2 million rice growers in the Mekong Delta have been persuaded to cut back on using harmful and unnecessary farm chemicals.

Former director general of IRRI, Dr Robert Cantrell had this to say: "It shows that the mistakes of the Green Revolution – where too much emphasis was sometimes put on the use of chemicals for pest control – have clearly been recognised and corrected," adding, "because of their toxicity, insecticides really should be used by farmers as a last resort, and we are very pleased to see that farmers have realised this for many years, especially here in the Philippines."

Well, if that is true, isn't it a fact that agricultural scientists had misled farmers all these years? Isn't it a fact that because of the over-emphasis on the use of chemicals to control pests, more problems have been created rather than being addressed? Isn't it a fact that besides polluting the environment, insecticides have changed the pest profile, turning many minor insect species to emerge as major pests? Does it not mean that if scientists had learnt from farmers, probably they could have found simple time-tested technologies that wouldn't have destroyed the fertile lands?

With the advent of modern science, which began to view everything traditional as backward and sub-standard, the collective wisdom of generations of farmers was lost. Simple time-tested local technologies unfortunately do not find any mention in the agriculture textbooks and curriculum. Such was the massive campaign to discredit everything traditional that modern science, its blind adoption and extensive application, became the essential ingredient for classifying farmers as 'progressive'. The result has been that while expensive and unwanted pesticides are being promoted and pushed by the scientists and policy-makers, farmers are looking for safe and ecological alternatives.

Modern science cannot be allowed a free play for unnecessary experimentation that does irreparable damage to the land and water that feeds the world. The arrogance of modern science breeds insensitivity to the existing ground realities, often imposing 'improved practices' that end up doing irreparable damage to the farming systems.

Devinder Sharma is a New Delhi-based food and trade policy analyst. His recent works include two books: *GATT to WTO – seeds of despair* and *In the famine trap*.
www.dsharma.org

[1] IRRI (2003) *Luzon farmers go clean and green.* Press Release, 14 Feb.
[2] IRRI (2004) Press Release, 28 July.

Sue Haddleton

Sue Haddleton studies Food Policy at City University. She previously worked as a Purchasing Manager in the food industry. s.haddleton@dsl.pipex.com

Analysis: the FISS

Driving a revolution in the food industry?

Is the government's new Food Industry Sustainability Strategy (FISS) going to cause a revolution in the food industry? I was optimistic that it might be the start of one, and perhaps also herald real progress in the way the government tackles important issues. But now I've read the strategy and responses from the stakeholder group that helped the officials to draw it up, I'm sorely disappointed – the FISS is a catalogue of lost opportunities.

The government has again shied away from any form of regulation in spite of campaign groups, and many stakeholders too, complaining about the problems of voluntary codes.

The grand statements are there, of course, with Margaret Beckett saying that "the consequences of climate change are proving devastating". But the catchphrases of FISS are "light touch" and "deregulation". These terms, which recur throughout, echo the theme of "choice" running through the government's white paper on public health. In both cases there is compelling evidence that the government should take a strong lead, and in both cases the wording punctures and deflates the mounting pressure to act.

FISS does have some strengths, some counts on which Defra has done well. For a start, it seems to understand the task in hand and recognise there are lots of issues and lots of actors involved. The document is certainly comprehensive.

Defra has evidently worked closely with the industry in drawing it up. This is also a strength.

What's more the FISS includes schemes to support change within industry, such as The Carbon Trust and Envirowise. The document builds on the previous draft strategy by increasing funding for science-based innovation and encourages more collaborative work with universities.

I think the problems, however, outweigh these strengths.

First, the FISS "challenges" industry to reduce carbon emissions by 20% by 2010, against a 1990 baseline, and it commits government and industry to a process of discussion. This is much different from committing industry to achieve the target itself.

The same goes for waste reduction, "challenging" the industry to reduce its own waste by 15-20% by 2010 with no definite targets.

By challenging the industry as a whole, the approach is most likely to be unfair and de-motivating. Those who do good work will go largely unrewarded and those who do little will be passengers.

Second, how long will these planned discussions take? The food industry has highly trained professional negotiators who are paid to look after the interests of their company or trade association. It will take time to reach effective solutions. Is climate change an issue where we have time on our side?

Third, whilst it is acknowledged that all companies cannot make the same changes, companies are likely to sign up for some parts of the sustainability agenda while leaving other profitable areas of their business untouched. An example – the other day a Marks and Spencer's lorry passed me, advertising their ethical credentials, but when I went into a store later that day, kilos of sweets were on display by the checkout.

Fourth, the government is encouraging more Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) of products in FISS. Having worked in the packaging industry for many years I have reservations about the clarity and basic assumptions of the published LCA reports I have read, especially if they haven't been done independently of a commercial organisation. For instance, a report by the Association of European Producers of Steel for Packaging (APEAL) in 2005, called *The eco-efficiency and nutritional aspects of different product packaging systems*, carried out a LCA of carrots. For their study of fresh carrots they used peeled carrots (less nutritious) and bunched carrots (higher transport costs). The more common, most sustainable, unpeeled topped carrots were not included. Another problem with LCA is the frequent assumption that recyclable packaging is 100% recycled, even if there are no collections or facilities. This is wildly unrealistic.

In short, the FISS is weak and allows industry to side-step crucial issues. If that wasn't enough of a problem, the signs are government is taking the same approach to its own commitments in the FISS. It says it plans to leads by example, and wants "to be recognised as amongst the leaders in sustainable procurement across EU Member states by 2009". Can the government really be serious, though, when it allows McDonald's a concession in Guy's Hospital?

More about

The FISS:
www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/fiss/index.htm

Nazi nutrition

How far should we question governments who tell us what to eat?

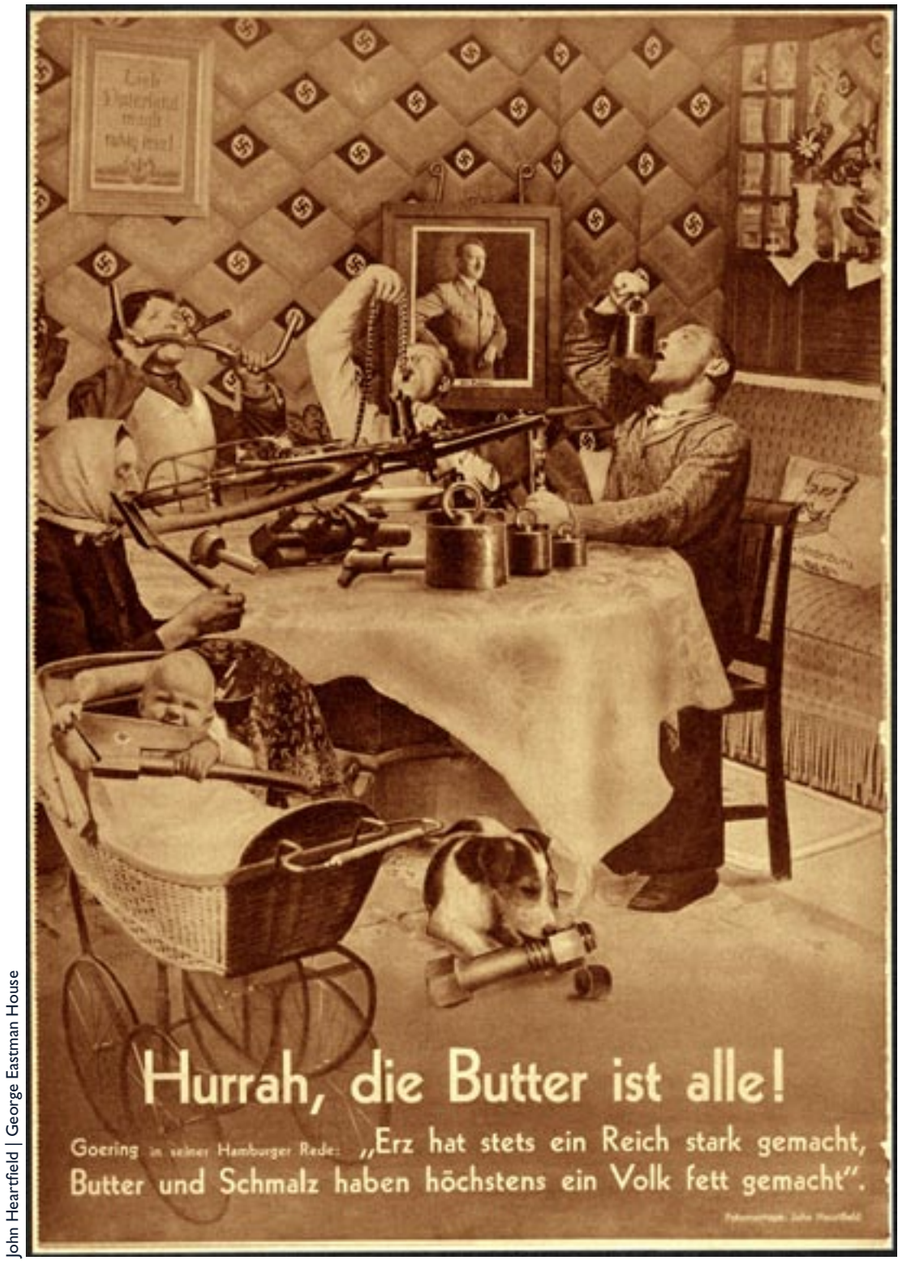
Michele Field
takes a warning from history

I am aghast that in all the initiatives that our government takes in regard to our food choice – the colour-coding that is so like film-certificates, the treating of some foods as if they were addictive and no better than drugs, the generally heavy 'policing' of our tastes – there is no reference to governments who have done this sort of thing in the past and how they've fallen in the mud. As the 'London Food Strategy' document published this May shows, policies like these are drafted without a glance at history.

The argument for more food historians to write about the history of food policies, and for more food policy people to read history, is so obvious to me that I won't push it. I want to simply to cite one article – which at this point is published only on the author's website, though he is a well-known food historian and would welcome a publisher's invitation to expand it to book length. The author is Giles MacDonogh, the article is about ideology and food in the Third Reich, and it is titled *Zigeunerrostbraten and the Stolper Jüngchen (Gypsy roast and the little boy from Stolp)*.

MacDonogh went into the research of cookery books and food policy during the Third Reich and the DDR not knowing what he would find. Of course, he half-expected to find that cookery books would no longer include recipes that would have been regarded as Jewish or drawn from 'inferior' races, and that much of Vienna's cusine would have to be re-labeled because of its Jewish associations. The frankfurter had always been made of beef so that it was acceptable to the Jewish bankers of Frankfurt – but how did the National Socialists explain away the non-Teutonic ingredients?

What he discovered, very interestingly, is that Nazi government food policy began with a 'grass roots' voice that is not unlike Jamie Oliver's. Trude Mohr was a cookery writer who urged a resurgence of 'peasant food', a return to nourishing rye bread instead of pies and cakes. There was also the emphasis then that exists in the UK today on children as food-students: according to *Mein Kampf*, the schoolgirl was 'the coming mother' and needed to develop a food consciousness.



John Heartfield | George Eastman House

Hurray, the butter is finished! Göring in his Hamburg speech: "Iron ore has always made an empire strong, butter and lard have at most made people fat."

Hitler's own food tastes were in fact quite like those of our parliamentary caterers' today. Hermann Göring was known as the man who could provide diplomats with a delicious meal, but Hilter himself was a vegetarian and wanted his food plain and politically correct. The stress was on health, not on the pleasures of food or the way mealtimes work to bring us together. This to my mind always signals a problem (and recurs in other narratives about governments who plunge into food regulation). It is as if you were raising your children to be 'healthy' only, rather than raising children who relish childhood, and who develop their minds and the reach of their personalities.

> According to *Mein Kampf*, the schoolgirl was 'the coming mother' and needed to develop a food consciousness

The 'naturalness' of food was a right-wing argument everywhere at that time – including for those who founded the Soil Association in the UK. (See the first chapter of Dick Taverne's *The march of unreason*.) Nothing wrong with 'naturalness' or with the SA... but I am made queasy about the way governments throughout history tend to periodically extol 'peasantry', and feel obliged to take a stand against anything 'gourmet'. MacDonogh, with a sense of humour, quotes a Nazi food writer on how "we just cook potatoes in the evenings and make lovely things out of them..." – a passage that could be written now.

But why? There was a lot of meat and fish available during the Nazi era, but it went to the soldier and not the ordinary family. If there were a philosophy-of-food current in Nazi Germany that has parallels with us now, it is this sense of self-rationing. We now self-ration because of ecological arguments (how expensive meat is to the environment), but we should analyse those arguments much as sophisticated cooks in the Third Reich had to search their consciences.

No government directives regarding food should be taken at face value. In 1939, Germany banned almost all milk products including yoghurt and soft cheeses, because diary product was needed to make the hard cheese that the soldiers could carry. But what if ordinary German cooks and dairy-farmers had objected – said NO! – and cut short the war that way?

What if good Germans had defiantly persisted in eating soft cheese and Jewish stuffed carp during the war? What would we think of them now – heroes or no? What do we think of people anywhere who are sceptical about government food directives today?

More about

Nazi nutrition:
www.macdonogh.co.uk/zig.htm
The London Food Strategy:
www.london.gov.uk/mayor/health/food/index.jsp

Michele Field is a freelance writer and journalist based in London. She is writing a book about edible foods that some people find repugnant.
michelefield@blueyonder.co.uk

Food, skill and democracy

On a Czech family farm

SECOND THOUGHT

Jo Murphy-Lawless

Jo Murphy-Lawless is a sociologist and lectures in the School of Nursing and Midwifery Studies, Trinity College Dublin.
jo.murphylawless@oceanfree.net

In 2001, soon after the Irish electorate had returned a 'No' vote, rejecting ratification of the EU Nice Treaty, I travelled to the east Czech Republic to explore what farmers thought about entry into the EU. Many Irish voters like myself had voted 'No' because they were concerned about what felt like a growing distance between their lives and where decisions were made about them. The Irish electorate had been told by EU leaders that their 'No' vote jeopardised EU enlargement and that they would need to vote again. That EU response was an instance of what the distinguished sociologist Zygmunt Bauman refers to as 'TINA' thinking – 'There Is No Alternative'.

It is a response from national governments and supra-national entities like the EU that we encounter with increasing frequency, especially when an issue appears to threaten the global economy as defined by global corporate thinking. Food production, worth trillions in global trade, is beset with TINAs. For example, it is now seen as vital to relocate to 'cheaper economies' while farming will be phased out from 'expensive' European economies.

I went to the Czech Republic because I believe there is another vital dimension to explore here, the connection between the seemingly disparate actions of the everyday routines of old-style mixed farming and a democratic exercise. Let me relate the story of one Czech farming family. This couple, in their 60s, are farming 18 hectares of land in one of the most fertile regions in the country.

They are the fifth generation to work the land, the farm having been in the family since 1840. For decades, they have grown wheat and sugar beet for sale alongside most of their own fruit and vegetables, which they bottle for use during the winter months. They keep ducks and chickens and the most beautiful pigs. They slaughter their own meat and make their own sausages. A farm this size with this level of fertility sustained a family of five comfortably up to the end of the 1980s, albeit with hard work.

EU entry seemed a double-edged sword to the couple, with farming due to continue but not as they had ever known it. Already during the 1990s, German agribusiness had moved in to take over the local sugar beet factory and had largely dismantled its value to the local economy. The couple knew their way of life was threatened as well by the growth of supermarkets and had gone up to Prague to see the newly-opened Tesco. The wife related to me vividly how she had become ill and faint as she walked down these never-ending aisles, disbelieving that the future of food shopping would be like this; to her eye, poor quality expensive produce that was not local and was certainly not fresh by her understanding.

The couple's best hope about EU entry was that it might give them a more stable currency for a severely diminished farming market. But the losses were mammoth. It was unlikely that their family farm would outlive them. There was no sustainable future for what the policy-makers scathingly termed 'subsistence farming' and no alternative to 'modernising', that is smaller farms being swallowed up into huge farm holdings.

So their skill in tending the land, in knowing how to produce their own food would vanish. They did not want to become just consumers in the newly expanded EU market which was the single most cited reason for enlargement by the corporate sector. They wanted very much to remain knowledgeable producers, balancing their own production by purchasing local milk, cheese and other fresh, affordable foodstuffs to supplement what they did not make themselves.

In a way, the visit to Tesco was the tipping point because it was a moment of sharp political recognition for this farming couple about their future. They said they had survived Communism and they hoped they would somehow survive the EU with their sense of place and belonging intact.

This brings me back to the connection between skill and the exercise of democratic expression. It was actually Marx who wrote that 'all social life is essentially practical' and that our sense of reality stems directly from 'sensuous human activity'.

Being able to practice a skilled life, to grow food or to prepare food, to exercise such core skills, enables us to speak with confidence about who and what we are and therefore what is vital for us in our everyday world. Because this is grounded knowledge, it should reinforce our assertion of our right to a living public space where we can express our needs and doubts.

Mike Rayner

Mike Rayner is Director of the British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group at the University of Oxford. mike.rayner@dphpc.ox.ac.uk

Analysis: social marketing

Could techniques that sell 'unhealthy' food be used to market health instead?

The increase in obesity in both developed and developing economies is a real problem: our children will soon be living shorter lives than our parents, and the diseases associated with obesity will soon be crippling health services.

There are many theories to explain the increase in obesity. Evolutionists tell us that we are adapted to an environment in which food is scarce. In many societies in the early 21st century, food is plentiful and varied and in such an environment we are bound by our genes to overeat and to become obese. Christians tell us that that we are bound by our nature – bequeathed by Adam – to behave in a way that is destructive of ourselves and our environment.

We cannot easily change our genes or human nature. The obvious solution is therefore to change the world: variously described as 'society' or 'the environment'. However politicians persist in focusing on 'behaviour change' as the solution to obesity: as if human behaviour is something entirely independent of human nature or the world in which we find ourselves.

> In contemporary society, there is a chasm of non-communication between policy-makers, corporate powerbrokers and people in their everyday lives. In response, we must use our skills in everyday life to form alternative democratic spaces where it is safe and useful to be together and decide what needs to be done. This might be the farmhouse kitchen table, it might be the church or the local community centre, all free public spaces. These are spaces beyond parliament where we can participate, explore and organise collective agendas for our family and community well-being, resisting for example, one more supermarket being built in the locality. Those moments of recognition where we see a more uncertain, less grounded way of life in the future, but which are presented to us as non-negotiable, can propel us to challenge 'TINA' thinking.

Psychologists have hundreds of theories of behaviour change. One of these theories – Social Marketing Theory – has recently come to be seen as offering more promise than the others, to such an extent that the government is developing a National Social Marketing Strategy to tackle, amongst other things, behaviour in relation to obesity.

Social Marketing Theory is defined by one of its foremost proponents as: "The application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society".

But why this theory amongst the many other possibilities? The commercial marketing of 'unhealthy' food has recently received much attention from public health bodies concerned with obesity. One reaction to this has been to suggest that the commercial marketing of unhealthy food – particularly to children – should be banned. Another reaction has been to suggest that the techniques used for the commercial marketing of 'unhealthy' food could be employed to market healthy behaviour and even health instead.

But is it really possible to market behaviour to consumers in the same way as you market Mars bars? Social Marketing Theory rests on the assumption that behaviour is a product that can be 'sold' to people who then consume it and that somehow there needs to be a transaction between those interested in getting people to change their behaviour and the rest of whom are wilfully reluctant to do so. But if pension plans cannot be sold to teenagers is it likely that healthy behaviour can be 'sold' to them either? Once you unpick the assumptions of Social Marketing Theory it seems unlikely and – being essentially manipulative – morally dubious.

But the main reason Social Marketing Theory is trendy is that it views an individual's behaviour as voluntary. See the definition above. If behaviour is voluntary it is a matter of choice. If it is a matter of choice then it is the responsibility of individuals rather than of society as a whole. This means that the theory fits well with bigger government agendas, including its 2004 White Paper, *Choosing health*.

But how much of our behaviour in relation to obesity is voluntary? How easy is it to change our eating patterns, the way we spend our leisure time and the way we travel about? Will it be sufficient merely to persuade people that it's in their own interests to give up their Mars bars, TVs and cars? Both evolutionists and Christians suggest that we need help because of human nature; that human beings are not free to choose in the way that they imagine they are. It is time to accept some help from Nanny.

More about

UK National Social Marketing Strategy:
www.nsms.org.uk
The *Choosing health* White Paper:
www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/12/07/92/04120792.pdf
Which? on 'choice':
www.which.net/campaigns/food/choice.html
The FEC's view:
www.foodethicscouncil.org/files/Gettingpersonal.pdf

Mind what you eat

Why are the effects of food on our mental health not taken more seriously?

Courtney Van de Weyer *discovers some frustrating obstacles*

Several years ago, I worked for both a pharmaceutical industry watchdog and a mental health law firm. The watchdog campaigned for public recognition of withdrawal problems with a widely prescribed antidepressant. Following a well-rehearsed and influential script of the pharmaceutical industry, the manufacturer consistently denied any problem.

At the law firm, I assisted clients who had been sectioned. Once on the ward, they were always placed on psychotropic medication – many were helped but some, unfortunately, were not. One of our clients was such a person – despite being prescribed different types and combinations of drugs, her life had been blighted by years of depression. She asked us to help look into other treatments.

Through this, I became aware of the evidence linking food and mental health and, consequently, began working for Sustain. Now that I have been able to research the area in depth, I am now firmly convinced that there is a link between what we eat and way we feel.

Moreover, I am convinced that the way in which food is now grown, processed, and marketed is contributing to the indisputable rise we are seeing in mental health problems globally. (And no, of course it is not the only factor – but it's a significant one.) Many of the psychotropic drugs prescribed are – in essence –cleaning up the mess caused by the same food system that is contributing to obesity and other food-related ill health.

Despite hundreds of studies, as well as thousands of anecdotes, doubts about the connection are rife amongst policy-makers and health professionals. To address these, we recently published a report that detailed the published evidence. No messy anecdotes were included – just peer-reviewed research, everything from epidemiology to randomised controlled trials.

Toting these reports around to policy-makers led to one phrase ringing in our ears: "interesting, but needs more research". But given that diet-related poor physical health is more prevalent in mental health patients, it is absurd (if not negligent) not to put greater effort into improving their diets. And if there happened to be an improvement in mental health – well, wouldn't that just be a bonus?

Yes, it is true that there are still a number of unanswered questions. More research is definitely necessary. But how? Talking with researchers in the area, who continually apply for and are continually refused funding, it is obvious that there are real problems in obtaining support for research on diet and mental health.

Read Sustain's new report – Changing diets, changing minds: how food affects mental well being and behaviour – www.sustainweb.org/mhealth_index.asp

Reasons might include the ignorance of some peer reviewers, often medical professionals who know little about dietary health. There is also the problem of the diet gurus – slickly marketed 'experts' spouting questionable evidence can tar the entire area as 'alternative' and therefore suspect in the eyes of policy-makers.

But, coming a full circle, there is also the little matter of drugs. Many of the professionals reviewing research applications, along with funders, are now directly tied to the pharmaceutical industry. Unsurprisingly, this can lead to zero interest in approving funding for any research not linked to drug treatment. Given the anonymity of peer reviews, there is no opportunity to spot conflicts of interest.

There are real problems in obtaining support for research on diet and mental health

Furthermore, government budget concerns mean that research into mental health treatment is increasingly being left to industry. One confidential document I have seen advocates this explicitly. The result is that non-pharmaceutical treatments are receiving little to no funding.

So, in spite of the wealth of evidence supporting dietary intervention, we're on the drugs indefinitely until the calls for 'more research' are satisfied. And until then, the cost of mental health problems will not be included in the costs of diet-related poor health.

My question is this – what, exactly, will satisfy? There are still research trials testing the role of diet in heart disease – yet what doctor does not prescribe dietary improvements to heart patients? The same, at the very least, should be done for those with mental health problems.

Heck, it might even help the drugs work better.

TSWhalen | www.tswhalen.com

Courtney Van de Weyer runs the Food and Mental Health Project at Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming.
courtney@sustainweb.org

Bill Vorley

Bill Vorley leads the Sustainable Markets Group at the International Institute for Environment and Development. bill.vorley@iied.org

Analysis: supermarkets

Retail revolution goes global

It's one thing to debate the impact of the supermarket revolution on farming in a country like the UK, with fewer than two per cent of the population in farming.

It's quite another to work out how to react to the rapid spread of that revolution to countries with a third or even a half of their population dependent on agriculture.

But that's what governments, producer organisations and civil society have to attempt, if we are to avoid running behind the changes which this revolution is ushering in.

Consider a few facts. For companies like Wal-Mart and Tesco, the undoubted targets for international expansion are China and India. In China, the top supermarket chains are growing at a phenomenal 25 per cent per year, and retailers in China, both domestic and foreign, are looking to increase their store numbers aggressively over the next five years. In Vietnam, while 90 per cent of grocery is still purchased through the traditional sector, supermarket sales are growing at 20 per cent per year, gaining a competitive edge over traditional 'wet markets' and corner stores – an edge which will get a further boost when it joins the WTO. In Central and Eastern Europe, the retail sector is consolidating rapidly, after a short flourishing of independent retailing following the fall of the Iron Curtain.

In line with wider impacts of globalisation, consumers are in broad terms the winners and primary producers are the losers from the supermarket revolution, especially in deregulated markets where structural oversupply becomes the norm. The zone of profitability has moved away from production, towards processing and retailing. That's not to say that preferred suppliers with the capital, technology and organisation aren't doing very well from these changes.

What is clear is that managing the growth of international supermarkets in ways that support the interests of the world's poor and promote sustainable development requires anticipatory policy, which is extremely hard to pull off.

Let's first look at the sources of competitive advantage in the supermarket model. These are (1) leveraging economies of scale by extracting more favourable terms from suppliers, (2) attention to distribution logistics, (3) supply chain management — achieving the right mix of products for maximum profit and minimum wastage, (4) own brands, which return the highest contribution to margin, (5) focus on customers, and (6) customer assurance, via supply chain standards and traceability.

How does this translate into demands on suppliers and farmers? Well, it requires favourable payment terms, timely delivery, bar coding, scheduling of production, quality, traceability and certification, and priority service, to name a few. These requirements are major constraints on participation by small producers.

Although there are some protests from small local retailers, which are disappearing fast, and from some producers where markets are most concentrated, governments generally seem comfortable with delegating much of the governance of food and farming to the supermarkets.

But in order to keep primary producers in the 'zone of profitability' while these changes take place, deliberate actions by producers, national governments and retailers are needed. There is still the opportunity for countries at the beginning of the retail revolution to introduce policies in advance of these changes.

The most obvious response is to develop producer organisations and intermediaries, which can compete with large enterprises in terms of economies of scale, to deal with requirements of downstream processors and retailers.

In terms of public policy interventions, there are two broad areas: manage the growth of supermarkets, and ensure a vibrant wholesale and retail sector as an efficient alternative. Regulation of zoning, opening hours, and below-cost selling are all ways to encourage a diversity of wholesale, retail and food services. The political strategy of the international retailers, on the other hand, is to remove impediments to applying their standard business model in all countries of operation.

National and global supermarkets themselves must also reconsider what corporate responsibility means. Links need to be made between retailer strategy and national and international development goals, improving accountability on both. As a first step, this could include a serious review of procurement practices and their impacts on small-scale producers.

The chances of success will be greatly enhanced by a three-pronged approach to research and policy development. We need three things: first, a much better understanding of the impacts of supermarket procurement practices in the rural economy; second, a comprehensive analysis of best practice in linking supermarket procurement and smaller scale producers and enterprises; and, third, the formation of international learning groups, which expose researchers, industry experts and policy-makers to different policy approaches, to get policy-making ahead of the wave of change which is moving through the global agrifood system.

More about

The 'Regoverning Markets' project
www.regoverningmarkets.org

Matt Loose

Matt Loose is an advisor with SustainAbility, an independent think tank and strategy consultancy on corporate responsibility and sustainable development. loose@sustainability.com

Analysis: corporate reporting

A revolution in transparency

A revolution in corporate transparency is needed before food companies can be held to account for their impacts on the global supply-chain.

Corporate transparency is a vital component of corporate accountability. It allows stakeholders to assess performance and to hold companies to account for their impacts. In the food sector it helps investors and consumers to make decisions about how well companies are living up to their commitments on issues like healthy eating and fair trade.

I looked at three companies in different parts of the food supply chain – Cargill, Unilever and Tesco – to assess how well they describe the scale, magnitude and efforts to manage their impacts on the global food supply-chain in their corporate responsibility reporting. I was left disappointed.

These three giants all have a massive presence in today's food industry and have been investing in embedding responsible practices in their supply chain. The information provided publicly, however, just doesn't allow readers to assess the success of their programmes. While all three refer to their supply chain, the information provided is generally anecdotal and tends to play up the socio-economic benefits of their business activities.

Of the three, only Unilever provides information on the scale of their impacts. None of the three provides meaningful information on pricing policies or on their approach (or performance) on lead times or supplier payments. There is very little information on how the companies are balancing long and short term supplier relationships and only anecdotal information on the support provided to small producers. There is one small ray of hope – efforts are being made to report on management of human rights in their supply chains.

While this was a small exercise and cannot be said to be representative of the state of reporting across the industry, there are clear warning signs here for those investors and consumers looking to make informed decisions. Without much improved information it will be very difficult to differentiate between those companies seeking to control and improve their social and environmental impact and those who aren't.

This is not to underestimate the scale of the challenge. Providing this information requires revolutionary new levels of transparency and breaking the barriers of perceived commercial sensitivity. But there is a precedent and a clear benefit for companies making this jump. In 2005, Nike gained many plaudits and precipitated a revolution in corporate reporting in the apparel sector by naming their suppliers. Who will be first in the food sector to take such a leap of faith?

The producer – Cargill

The most recent information on the Cargill website is from the Company's 2003 *Citizenship report* – now over 3 years ago. The report mentions the huge human consequences of the business – with one plantation providing livelihoods for up to 50,000 people – but does not mention the company's policies on pricing or include any meaningful discussion of impacts. The information provided is anecdotal – more public relations than a meaningful attempt to assess company performance.
www.cargill.com/files/br_citizenship.pdf

The retailer – Tesco

Tesco has quietly been gearing up its corporate responsibility reporting and now publishes an annual corporate responsibility review and online portal. The review describes the ethical trading approach used by the company. The only data provided by Tesco about the supply chain is on training and risk assessment in supply chain labour standards and in local sourcing. Surprisingly, given the criticism levelled at Tesco's monopolistic activities, there is very little other information on the company's supply chain or purchasing activities.
www.tesco.com/csr/index.html

The manufacturer – Unilever

Unilever – a global leader in corporate sustainability reporting and a winner in the recent UK ACCA sustainability reporting awards – is by far the most progressive reporter of the three. The Unilever *Environmental and social report* describes how the company spends £15.9 billion on raw materials and packaging – of which over 65% come from agriculture. Of note is Unilever's research partnership with Oxfam, which examines links between Unilever's operations and wealth creation and poverty reduction in Indonesia. There is some information on how Unilever approaches relationships with suppliers, but no information reported on how it negotiates prices or how it manages lead times.
www.unilever.com/ourvalues/environmentandsociety/

Charlie Clutterbuck

Charlie Clutterbuck is an agricultural scientist who works a lot with trade unions and runs Environmental Practice @ Work Ltd. www.epaw.co.uk | www.sustainablefood.com

Analysis: sound sourcing

Tools for ethical traceability

The impact our food has on the environment, the lives of people who produce it and much else besides, is increasingly regulated by companies and their auditors. The old system of social public health law, set by and accountable to democratic processes, and policed by state bodies, is on the wane worldwide.

Supplementing and supplanting the law, then, are standards enforced by company contracts, which set out strict specifications for suppliers. These systems are checked by company buyers and auditors, who usually work to international business standards. These voluntary measures often go beyond the legal requirements of individual states. Driving this trend is a recognition that traceability and 'due diligence' are important to ensure public confidence.

These new business systems rely on external auditors for verification, rather than government inspection. The auditing process is hidden and can come down to costly box-ticking. It can be very expensive for small suppliers as costs are often passed down the supply chain, though 'social audit', where local auditors learn to do the job, can address some of these issues. What's more, auditing is not 'transparent' and may hide problems – Kenyan flower growing, for example, is currently under particular scrutiny. Auditing checks that the system is working, but it does not tell the world what is going on.

Working conditions, for example, are assessed against standards set by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). But the ILO standards have no legal force. Instead the Ethical Trading Initiative, set up by 50 member organisations of companies, NGOs and Trade Unions, uses the ILO Conventions to determine an 'Ethical Base Code'. Indeed it is the ETI – not a government or international agency – that is investigating Kenyan flower growing.

But can we rely on suppliers policing themselves? The UK DEFRA Food Procurement Initiative recommends group assessment, involving a manager, along with a trade union rep or NGO, and another relevant person such as a social auditor or local staff rep. This would help to ensure transparency and honesty in assessments.

On May Day 2006, the International Finance Corporation (World Bank) published its Performance standards for Social & Environmental Sustainability. These Standards spell out what hopeful clients of the World Bank need to do to demonstrate they are controlling their social and environmental impacts.

I have made these standards more active and put them online to help organisations worldwide develop their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This helps other interested parties check them against ethical (and sustainable) standards.

Interactive web tools are only one way to enhance 'ethical traceability' – future technologies could provide a further boost. Customers could have electronic access to interested stakeholders and social partners, quizzing them directly about a company's performance. Ethical information could even be put in product barcodes, set up to 'talk' with customers as well as the stores, so people could find out what is currently 'not on the label'. To improve the food supply chain – to make it socially and environmentally sound – we cannot rely on a few experts, activists or consultants. We need to build the capacity of people working all the way along it. They need the skills and knowledge to know what to look and to ask for, and to be able to respond to the increasing demands for more ethical and sustainable sourcing.

Do you think technology can boost ethical traceability? Take a look at the CSR Planner and submit your feedback!
www.epaw.co.uk/csr

Case study –
Co-operative Retail

The Co-operative Retail want to help develop the skills of their suppliers to trade ethically, supporting 'sound sourcing'. They are particularly focused on 'second tier' suppliers, because that is where many of the challenges reside. They already run interactive workshops where suppliers 'learn by doing' – they wanted to know whether the same method could be transposed to the web.

The online toolkit we have created with them enables suppliers to access up-to-date information about relevant Conventions and Codes. Suppliers are asked to produce an Action Plan and to submit their responses to an online database. The retailer can interrogate the database to identify where support is needed and follow progress.

More about

ILO Conventions
www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/docs/declworld.htm and www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/
The ETI
www.ethicaltrade.org
The Kenyan cut flowers investigation
www.ethicaltrade.org/Z/lib/2005/02/rept-kenyafl-wrs/index.shtml
Defra's Food Procurement Initiative
www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/pdf/toolkit-procurement-v01.pdf

NEWS

Good food up north...

Book now to reserve your place at a major event in Bradford, on 19th June, which the Food Ethics Council is organising jointly with the Ethnic Food Action Group and the City of Bradford. The conference is going to be a unique chance for businesses, social enterprises and local communities to celebrate and debate all that is good about food in the North of England. The focus is on local sourcing, ethnic foods and ethical issues.

We will hear success stories and discuss why more and more people care about issues like fair trade, health and where their food comes from, making ethical food a growth sector. We will debate the pros and cons of sourcing ethnic food ingredients locally, issues around landscape and regional identity, working conditions in the food sector within the UK and overseas, supermarket power, and 'ethical' marketing.

The event will be chaired by Sheila Dillon, presenter of the BBC Food Programme, and confirmed speakers include Lord Haskins, Pam Warhurst (Deputy Chair, Countryside Agency), Zad Padda (Ethical First), David Jago (Mintel), Gilberth Bermudez (the COLSIBA union, Costa Rica), Gillian van der Meer (Rural Cultural Forum) and Geoff Tansey (author of *The food system*).

This conference is inspired by an event we organised with a number of other organisations to mark World Food Day 2005, called 'If food could talk... hidden stories from the food chain', which was held in London. It is timed to coincide with the Bradford Mela – Europe's biggest festival. There will be a trip to the Mela and an evening meal on the day before the conference. See page 14 for more details.

Personalised nutrition

We are delighted that Dame Deirdre Hutton, Chair of the Food Standards Agency, could take part in a roundtable meeting we organised on 'personalised nutrition', hosted by the Institute for Public Policy Research on 9th May. 'Personalised nutrition' is about tailoring food to individual dietary needs: it is a business strategy, a field of research and – crucially – a way of thinking about public health, personal responsibility and the role of government. Dame Deirdre opened two hours of fruitful discussion by giving some of her own views and those of the agency on the responsibilities of government, companies and individuals for public health.

The 25 people at the meeting came from the Department of Health, the National Consumer Council, businesses, campaign groups and universities. While many felt that it is vital to support and safeguard individual autonomy in the pursuit of better public health, there was little enthusiasm for current trends towards 'personalisation', whether in the shape of more targeted nutritional advice or in policy statements that hold individuals responsible for health outcomes over which they have little control.

Much of the discussion was about how government could improve public health and tackle health inequalities, at the same time as respecting people's individual autonomy. For instance, does the newly prominent field of 'social marketing' manage to tread that line, and how can government work more effectively with investors to change the way food companies behave?

A short summary of the meeting will soon be on our website (www.foodethicscouncil.org). There you will also find two previous reports about 'personalised nutrition': our *Getting personal* report, published in December 2005, and a report of the launch symposium we held to mark its publication.

reading

Animals, ethics and trade: the challenge of animal sentience
Jacky Turner & Joyce d'Silva (eds.) | 2006 | Earthscan
This book contains 24 of the papers presented at a Compassion in World Farming Conference held in 2005, on the theme 'From Darwin to Dawkins: the science and implications of animal sentience'. Council members Kate Rawles and Ben Mepham each contribute a chapter. BM

Chew on this: everything you don't want to know about fast food
Eric Schlosser & Charles Wilson | 2006 | Houghton Mifflin Company
The author of *Fast food nation*, the book that put thousands off their chicken nuggets, returns to share his insight about what really goes on in the world of fast food. AB

Hunger: an unnatural history
Sharman Apt Russell | 2006 | Basic Books NYC
Although this is for the general reader, there are chapters that fit squarely into the picture of 'food ethics'. The chapter on the Minnesota Experiment in 1944, where volunteers were starved to the point at which the liberators would find Jewish Germans and POWs – so as to test various diets (and an economical use of postwar food resources) to understand how to restore health – is the stuff of bad dreams. MF

Hunters, herders and hamburgers: the past and future of human-animal relationships
Richard W. Bulliet | 2005 | Columbia University Press
A very important book about animals as food. The final third of the book looks at some historical events still not explained, such as why England led the world in the outlawing of 'baiting', from the bull-baiting ban in 1802 to animal fights of all kinds banned in 1835, and how this affected the attitude of farmers towards their own animals. MF

Livestock production and society
R Geers & F Madec (eds.) | 2006 | Wageningen Academic Publishers
A thorough discussion that ranges from the big picture – with chapters on values, culture and the history of livestock farming, and on public perceptions of food safety – to the fine detail of different approaches to housing, transport and slaughter. TM

Personal responsibility: building a responsible society
Baroness Mary Warnock, Richard Reeves, Lord Phillips of Sudbury | 2006 | Royal Society of Arts
These three separate lectures were sponsored by the Institute for Global Ethics. They are available as pdf or audio recordings from www.thersa.org; look for the website section called 'lecture texts'. MF

Recognizing the autonomy of nature
Thomas Heyd (ed) | 2005 | Columbia University Press
This is fascinating philosophy, and Chapter 6 in particular, 'Autonomy and agriculture' by William Throop and Beth Vickers, which looks at the moral value of different agri-cultural practices. If we accept that we should not 'dominate' nature or compromise it, then what moral 'rights' does farmland have? MF

Slow living
Wendy Parkins & Geoffrey Craig | 2006 | Berg
An exploration of the politics and philosophy of 'slowness', with chapters on Slow Food, and on food and pleasure. ED

Through the kitchen window: women explore the intimate meanings of food and cooking
Arlene Voski Avakian (ed.) | 2005 (first pub. 1997) | Berg
This is a fun book, full of reminiscences and recipes from different authors, that sees pleasure, pain and intimacy in food. ED

Vanity, vitality, and virility: the science behind the products you love to buy
John Emsley | 2006 | OUP
Britain's most acclaimed populariser of chemistry writes in the second section of this book about how chemistry facts do not support many of the food recommendations that have taken hold as 'correct views'. MF

Your diet tailored to your genes: preventing diseases or misleading marketing?
Helen Wallace | 2006 | GeneWatch UK
The most comprehensive critique to date of nutrigenomics and 'personalised nutrition', areas of research and business that look set to shape public and private sector responses to concern about obesity quite profoundly. The report ends convinced that 'personalised nutrition' is "a false solution to the problem of diet-related disease". TM

upcoming events

bulletin of the food ethics council

2nd - 4th June '06	**13th Congress on Alternative to Animal testing.** Centre for Alternative and Complementary Methods to Animal Testing | linz2006@zet.or.at | Linz, Austria
6th - 7th June '06	**2nd Annual Obesity Europe Conference - Developing a Long Term Strategy for Health and Wellness.** Epsilon | dcraft@epsilonevents.com | Brussels, Belgium
8th - 9th June '06	**25th FAO Regional Conference for Europe** FAO | Daniela.Moro@fao.org | Riga, Latvia
11th - 14th June '06	**1st SAFE International Congress on Food Safety** The SAFE Consortium | safeconsortium@safeconsortium.org | Budapest, Hungary
19th June	**Good Food Up North... Local, Ethnic, Ethical** FEC, Ethnic Food Action Group | info@foodethicscouncil.org | Bradford, UK
22nd - 24th June '06	**Eursafe 2006 - Ethics and the Politics of Food.** European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics | Eursafe2006@etikkom.no | Oslo, Norway
29th June - 1st July '06	**Food and History: Health, Culture, Tourism and Identity** University of Central Lancashire | ejkelly@uclan.ac.uk | Preston, UK
23rd July - 6th Aug '06	**2006 IAAS World Congress and Seminar: Sustainable Development -Environmental Protection and Agricultural Innovation** IAAS-Denmark | info@malaysia2006.dk | Kuching, Malaysia
6th - 9th Aug '06	**A Just and Healthy Society. Eighth World Congress of Bioethics.** IAB, Chinese Medical Association | ocatherineli@chinamed.com.cn | Beijing, China
11th - 13th Aug '06	**The Wholesome Food Conference 2006** WFA | sky@wholesome-food.org.uk | Staunton, UK
23rd -25th Aug '06	**1st IFOAM International Conference on Animals in Organic Production** IFOAM | n.sorensen@ifoam.org | St. Paul, USA
3rd - 7th Sept '06	**Agricultural Engineering for a Better World** CIGR, EurAgEng, VDI-MEG and FAO | info@2006cigr.org | Bonn, Germany
5th – 6th Sept '06	**Genomics for Development? The Life Sciences and Poverty Reduction** INNOGEN | r.e.hanlin@sms.ed.ac.uk | London, UK`xl
13rd - 15th Sept '06	**Quality of Life: The Heart of the Matter** UFAW | scioff@ufaw.org.uk | London, UK
17th - 20th Sept '06	**Sustaining Production Systems to Improve the Livelihoods (health, well-being, wealth) of Livestock Farmers.** EAAP | saltur@eaap2006.gen.tr | Antalya, Turkey
17th - 21st Sept '06	**Food is Life. 13th World Congress of Food Science & Technology.** IUFoST | ufost@nantes.inra.fr | Nantes, France
18th - 20th Sept '06	**What will Organic Farming Deliver?** The Colloquium of Organic Researchers, Heriot-Watt University | carol.aab@warwick.ac.uk | Edinburgh, UK
20th Sept '06	**Ethical Traceability in the Food Chain** food-ethics.net | www.food-ethics.net | Brussels, Belgium
24th - 29th Sept '06	**9th International Symposium on Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms (ISBGMO)** ISBR | www.isbr.info | Jeyu Island, South Korea
28th - 30th Sept '06	**1st World Congress of Public Health Nutrition** SENC, IUNS | senc@pcb.ub.es | Barcelona, Spain
28th - 30th Sept '06	**New Pathways for European Bioethics.** Centre for Biomedical Ethics and Law Faculty of Medicine, K U Leuven | sMyriam.Swartenbroeckx@med.kuleuven.be | Leuven, Belgium
9th - 13th Oct '06	**Science, Technology, and Trade for Peace and Prosperity** IRC | rice2006@gmail.com | New Delhi, India
18th - 21st Oct '06	**3rd International Congress of the Local Agro-food Systems Network Alter 2006: Food and Territories.** CITA | alter2006@idr.es | Baeza (Jaén), Spain
24th - 27th Oct '06	**4th Latin American Congress on Agroforestry for Sustainable Animal Production** Experimental Station of Pastures and Forages 'Indio Hatuey' and others. | agroforesteria2006@indio.atenas.inf.cu | Havana, Cuba
25th - 26th Oct '06	**Nano and Microtechnologies in the Food and Healthfood Industries** The Institute of Nanotechnology, MANCEF | carrie.smith@nano.org.uk | Amsterdam, Netherlands
15th - 19th Dec '06	**9th Biennial Conference of International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE) on Ecological Sustainability and Human Well-being.** SEE | info@isee2006.com | New Delhi, India