

# food ethics

The magazine of the Food Ethics Council

## Spoilt for choice?

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Jeanette Longfield | Tom MacMillan | Ben Mephram | Pete Riley  
Laura Sale | Geoff Tansey | Riki Therivel | Tom Wakeford



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# FOOD ETHICS COUNCIL

Food Ethics, the magazine 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 independent comment and analysis.

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

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# Shopping around

## A better set of options

If I mention the word 'choice', what springs to mind: freedom of choice, informed choice and the opportunities of plenty? Or phrases associated with the flipside of choice: spoiled for choice, Hobson's choice, the illusion of choice, or indeed having no choice? Whatever your interpretation – choice as something to celebrate or something to fear – what is undeniable is that choice and food in today's world are inextricably linked. The choices people make about food have enormous impacts. Some are very visible – for example in widening waistlines or full food waste bins. Some are hidden – such as unfair treatment of food workers in distant parts of the world.

I argue strongly – as do others in this issue and as does the Food Ethics Council in its flagship report 'Beyond Business As Usual' – that food businesses need to choose edit on behalf of people. The food industry needs to enable people as consumers to have a better choice of choice, with the most unsustainable and unhealthy items removed to leave a better set of options.

However, this is not just about the options available on supermarket shelves or restaurant menus. The issue of choice is relevant along the whole of food value chains, right back to the farmer and beyond. This includes what government or businesses choose to invest research into.

It begs the question 'whose choice is it anyway'? Decisions made about whether to research public acceptability of GM food or how to improve farming methods to enhance soil fertility, for example, will have consequences for how and what we eat in the years and decades to come.

One of the biggest choices people make about their food is whether to eat meat and, if so, how much they eat. The thorny issue of meat consumption is one that puts many of the issues around the relationship between choice and food into the spotlight. In 'Prime Cuts: Valuing the meat we eat' – written by the Food Ethics Council and WWF-UK – we explore the notion of people in high meat-eating countries like the UK eating 'less but better' meat. Many people give little consideration to how much meat they eat. That's because eating meat is culturally ingrained and tends to be a habit-driven choice. So, meat becomes the default option if people want a 'proper meal'.

If you begin to realise the impacts high meat consumption have – on our own health, but also on the health of the planet and of farmed animals – then the choice of 'less but better' meat consumption seems a more attractive option. As we mention in the report, it is not a case of win-wins all round and this is

a complex and contentious issue, not least when you take into account the impacts of such a shift in diet on farmers (and others in the meat industry). We argue that a 'less but better' meat consumption message is preferable to the over simplistic 'eat less meat'.

I've gone down this route myself. You could say I've made an informed decision to be a flexitarian (although I'm sure someone can come up with a better name for it!) We will wait and see whether flexitarianism becomes a genuine and attractive option for the mainstream. It's easy to take choice for granted. But beyond those who have the luxury of choice, are the many whose choice is reduced or non-existent: farmed animals, the very young, future generations, those living in extreme poverty and our very own Planet Earth.

Our food choices matter – not just to us, but to others too. That is where values of respect, compassion and fairness really impact – and where we should reflect on what we deem acceptable and unacceptable. Non-food choices affect the priority we give to food. On what and how much people choose to spend their hard-earned money in areas like bills, entertainment and travel influence how much they have to spend on food – and vice versa.

I would like everyone to be in a position to have the freedom to choose, but I would also like everyone to be able to make more informed, more considered, 'better' choices. It should be people's values that ultimately drive choice – rather than just the gargantuan marketing budgets of particular brands that sway our decisions about what we buy. But can we move from market-driven choices to values-based choices?

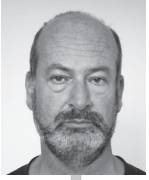
This question is why it's so important to explore the challenges and opportunities of choice in more depth in this issue. In the introduction that follows, Roger Levett gives an excellent overview of many different aspects of choice and of our contributors' takes on the subject. I won't therefore attempt to reference the great range of articles in this issue.

Finally, I would like to thank the contributors for choosing to write for this issue and you for choosing to read Food Ethics. Are we spoiled for choice when it comes to food? I hope this issue prompts you to think about your own food choices, about how they impact others and about how you can positively influence others' food choices through your work. ■

Dan Crossley is Executive Director at the Food Ethics Council

# The choice paradox

## Adding up the costs and benefits



Here in the West we enjoy huge amounts of choice over the food we buy. But do we really have a free choice, or is it just smoke and mirrors? And what's so good about freedom to choose what we put on our plate anyway? **Roger Levett** assesses the arguments.

To saunter along a row of restaurants at dusk, the varied aromas starting to stir one's appetite, the candles flickering invitingly in the windows, the waiters hovering in the doorways in their smart clothes and welcoming smiles, drawing out and savouring the moment of indecision before all their different blandishments. Or to glide a trolley along the spotless shining aisles of a supermarket, past riotous cascades of the most exquisite produce of six continents, any of them yours just by reaching out your hand ... These exercises of choice are surely among life's pleasures. As Thomas Jelley says: If choice is the ultimate luxury, food provides seemingly endless indulgent opportunities for (the relatively affluent) consumers worldwide.

Choosing some things and not others is how we each exert our autonomy, express our personality, realise our own aspirations. It is how we each contribute our infinitesimal nudge to the vast democracy of the free market, Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', which almost magically brings our powers of production into the most perfect possible balance with our desires of consumption. Choice drives innovation, progress and wealth creation. The saunter down the restaurants or supermarket is the acme of freedom and fulfilment. We are living what our ancestors could only dream.

Hence it is obligatory for politicians and pundits to frame any proposition about what we eat and how it is produced in terms of choice. We don't make people eat better food: we enable them to make better choices. We don't ban unhealthy or environmentally damaging food: we choice edit. No policy can enter discourse without paying its respects to choice. How could choice possibly be anything but a blessing, to be extended to the utmost possible?

Actually it's not so simple. This collection looks at the pitfalls and complications, asking: who chooses? How do choices by some affect choices by others? Several contributors mention the old slogan 'The consumer is king'. It is actually highly misleading. The point of a king is that there's only one, and he

can command things to be different. But shoppers can only choose from what's in front of us. As Jeanette Longfield points out, 'The food industry does not – and could not – give us an infinite range of products for us to choose 'freely' from. They choose, on our behalf, a range of products to offer us and they decide how they will be priced and how they will be marketed, right down to where they will be on which shelf.' If we are kings, we're Christmas cracker kings: our choice is between a red paper crown, a green paper crown, and sulking hatless.

Of course if enough of us shun a product, the shops will stop selling it. Pete Riley notes that 'in the UK during the late 1990s, many people faced with foods carrying GM labels chose to vote with their wallets. They stopped buying the likes of Sainsbury's/Safeway GM tomato puree and Unilever's Bean Feast to avoid GM ... UK supermarkets responded swiftly to consumer demand and withdrew all GM ingredients from their own brand products. Most food manufacturers followed suit. Fifteen years later these bans remain in place.' But this power only works in bulk. Paradoxically 'the consumer' is only king when a mass of consumers act collectively: when enough of us behave the same to be worth the market responding to. When we think we are our most autonomously and idiosyncratically individual, our market leverage dwindles to insignificance, and we are totally captive to the decisions made by suppliers.

Moreover, what the farmers grow and can offer is constrained by the choices already made further up the chain. Tom MacMillan argues that 'today's research findings shape tomorrow's research questions. Some of these choices will shape technology and society, and the opportunities available to farmers, consumers and citizens, over decades to come.' He gives the example of cereals where 'Most R&D investment over the past few decades has gone towards improving short-straw varieties' to maximise yields in conditions where fertilisers and herbicides have been readily available. Yet, in low external input systems such as organic farming, long-straw varieties are often preferred, as they suppress

weeds, have few problems with lodging due to lower nitrogen availability, and make good use of the straw elsewhere on the farm.' Geoff Tansey provides a chilling reminder that 'a huge set of interests operate to influence and constrain' consumer choices, especially World Trade Organisation rules heavily influenced by corporate business.

And some choices are one way. Even if the systematic labelling Pete Riley advocates enabled consumers to avoid GM, and enough did so to keep GM products off the market, if the GM pollen has blown onto the neighbouring organic farms or the GM salmon have interbred with wild ones, it's too late to put the genie back into the bottle. Which suggests that the benefits should be pretty overwhelming to justify the risks: something rather more pressing and socially worthy than just a payoff for some corporation that has taken a punt on genetic engineering. Some former strong opponents of GM now think 'golden rice' – genetically engineered to provide vitamin A – is such a case because it could address vitamin A deficiency that blights millions of poor children's lives in developing countries. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/feb/02/genetic-modification-breakthrough-golden-rice>) Though this begs the question: aren't there better ways to enable poor people to get enough vitamin A, that don't require gambles as irreversible, and as potentially ecologically catastrophic, as the introduction of cane toads or rabbits to Australia? Such as reducing poverty so they can afford foods that already have it?

## Pity the well-meaning, scrupulous Guardian-reading shopper

The same argument bites closer to home. When Conservative minister Anna Soubry deplores the inability of poor people to choose better food, the implications are politically subversive: if she wants healthier eating she's got to remove the unhealthy choices by regulation, or raise the incomes of the poor. Or, as Jeanette Longfield advocates, make bad food more expensive, to reflect its 'externalities' – though doing that in isolation will make things even tougher for the poor. Behind all this is the brute fact that that consumer choice depends on ability to pay. In any market, the poor have less choice. That's what poor means – having to put up with less, and/or worse, because you can't afford more and better.

And to further twist the knife, choices by the rich can directly deprive the poor. Quinoa, a food crop in Peru and Bolivia for thousands of years, has recently become trendy in the first world because it combines high protein content (including amino acids hard for vegetarians to get), low fat, starch and culinary novelty. But, the Guardian reports (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jan/16/vegans-stomach-unpalatable-truth-quinoa>), 'The appetite of countries such as ours for this grain has pushed up prices to such an extent that poorer people in Peru and Bolivia, for whom it was once a nourishing staple food, can no longer afford to eat it. Imported junk food is cheaper. In Lima, quinoa now costs more than

chicken. Outside the cities, and fuelled by overseas demand, the pressure is on to turn land that once produced a portfolio of diverse crops into quinoa monoculture.'

The article draws a parallel with asparagus: 'Peru has also cornered the world market in asparagus. Result? In the arid Ica region where Peruvian asparagus production is concentrated, this thirsty export vegetable has depleted the water resources on which local people depend. NGOs report that asparagus labourers toil in sub-standard conditions and cannot afford to feed their children while fat cat exporters and foreign supermarkets cream off the profits. That's the pedigree of all those bunches of pricy spears on supermarket shelves.' So pity the well-meaning, scrupulous Guardian-reading shopper, dithering in front of the packets of quinoa trying to balance giving the kids a good spread of amino acids with less meat against the carbon footprint and the oppressed Peruvians forced to feed their kids the junk food s/he's proud of avoiding.

Ben Mephram advocates an ethical matrix, identifying all the different ethical dimensions, to at least enable our Guardianista to dither in an organised, systematic and well-informed manner. But it is striking to see Julia Hailes, famous for the Green Consumer Guides, whose premise was that informed and discriminating purchasing choices could drive the economy towards sustainability, now complaining that people don't want to have to inform themselves about all the ethical consequences whenever they go out to buy things, and would prefer government, with its vastly superior powers of research and assessment, to save us the trouble by outlawing the bad. She contrasts Sainsbury's, who still let people choose goods not made to their standards, with M&S, whose produce is almost all own brand and therefore subject to their ethical policies. Though a quick look at the M&S website showed that among many other wonders they are offering 'dressed fresh Canadian lobster', a product whose wanton air freighting doesn't even have the possible justification of supporting poor farmers that can be prayed in defence of Kenyan beans. The way suppliers can combine the most pious statements of principle with selling that kind of product is mirrored by the way customers who regard themselves as responsible and ethical can buy them: Laura Sale points out, not perhaps surprisingly, that people tend to say, and believe, that they are greener than their actual purchasing choices reveal them to be. The gap between what people say and what they do accounts for at least some of the failure of green consumerism to deliver what was claimed for it.

Thomas Jelley poses the question: 'what rational consumer would willingly choose to eat an imbalanced diet to long term personal detriment knowing that the planet's bio-physical limits cannot sustain it?' and suggests the answer: 'one that is still physiologically programmed in evolutionary terms to wonder where the next meal is going to come from and who, despite being better connected than ever before, remains meaningfully proximate to no more than about 150 people.' I'd add: or who gives current gratification high value compared to possible future downsides because, as Keynes mordantly observed, 'in the long run we are all dead', and who sees no point in foregoing personal satisfactions when this will make no difference to overall impacts because others will free-ride. These



Photo: Regent's College London

are both eminently rational standpoints for individuals, which can only be rationally be altered by collective political action.

We're often not rational anyway. Jeanette Longfield points out that 'Marketing can be so powerful that people can be persuaded to happily pay for products like bottled water when its equivalent can be obtained virtually free from the taps.' The Heart Attack Grill in Las Vegas, an establishment 'famous for its huge hamburgers, extra-fat milkshakes and fries cooked in lard [which] uses the tagline 'Taste worth dying for', and invites patrons to don surgical gowns as they choose from items with names like Triple Bypass Burger is exceptional only in its insouciantly blatant and defiant bravado. A recent report that its 'mascot', a popular customer who 'came to the restaurant daily and encouraged passing tourists to try its calorie-laden offerings' had died of a heart attack outside it is only noteworthy for the brutally clear link of cause and effect. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/feb/13/heart-attack-grill-mascot-dies?INTCMP=SRCH>) This amounts to a pretty depressing picture. Food 'choice' is largely exercised by corporations for their own commercial interests, and at grievous health and environmental cost. In so far as richer consumers have genuine choice, they often exercise it to more or less knowingly damage their own health, the planet or the poor, if not all three together.

Several of the contributors are actively involved in efforts to fight back. Tom MacMillan describes initiatives to help farmers pool knowledge and muscle to commission more sustainable research to counterbalance the power of the multinationals. Tom Wakeford introduces Our Food, 'a new venture that aims to give citizens the opportunity to imagine new relationships with food and the ways it is produced, processed and marketed' which can push back against 'the industrial intensification of food production', while Jeanette Longfield points out that Sustain and other lobbying groups have had some success in

curbing the most manipulative marketing and getting price signals to start to reflect the externalities of damaging foods.

Geoff Tansey reports that in international trade rules 'things are changing. Developing countries, especially the larger ones, are now standing up more strongly for what is in their interest. So too are many civil society organisations and some scientists. These are some of the reasons why 'progress' in WTO has stalled'.

Riki Therivel reports on the work of the Oxford Food Bank, collecting food near expiry from supermarkets and distributing it to charities. This is the flip side of choice: what the Food Bank is given is the difference between what the supermarkets chose to offer and what the people of Oxford chose to buy. It is a measure of the degree of cross purposes between sellers and buyers. And that, in turn, defines the choice that the Bank can offer the charities and community groups it can serve: here's what we were given today: what can you do with it? Riki reports that, while a few of the food bank's clients have dropped out because they dislike the uncertainty, most actually relish the challenge. Many cooks 'love coming out to the van to see what is available.' Clients Riki asked 'generally gave the impression that lack of choice was a challenge rather than a constraint, and associated it with "getting creative".'

And perhaps that offers the key to the conundrum. The ideal of 'choice' in whose name so much damage is done shouldn't be such an overriding goal anyway because we can actually get satisfaction from using our ingenuity and creativity to make the best out of limited choice. This seems to me a rather useful lesson, given how climate change is likely to drastically curtail the currently extraordinary, historically unprecedented, degree of food choice which at least the rich now have. ■

Roger Levett is a partner in Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants, and main author of *A Better Choice of Choice*, Fabian Society, 2003

# Greening the unconscious

## Do implicit attitudes influence consumer choice?



**Laura Sale's** research on implicit and explicit attitudes towards 'green' products reveals some key insights into how to motivate consumers to make more sustainable choices.

In 2007, Sir Terry Leahy (former chief executive of Tesco) called for a revolution in green consumption. More than five years on, while our patterns of consumption may be slowly evolving, we are far from achieving the revolution that Sir Terry Leahy envisaged. Despite many consumers fervently expressing their green credentials, rarely do their claims translate into significant changes in consumer choice. This attitude-behaviour gap is often explained in terms of barriers to action where consumers may be faced with a lack of information, a lack of knowledge, monetary constraints and so on, preventing them from engaging in more sustainable patterns of consumption. In its most simplistic form, the process of closing the gap would involve removing barriers to action, thereby enabling consumers to act in accordance with their 'green' attitudes. However, this whole philosophy is dependent on a key assumption that psychological research has recently challenged: do consumers actually hold the green attitudes they espouse?

Consumer research is typically based exclusively on the assessment of explicit attitudes. These attitudes are, by definition, conscious, controlled and reflective which means that not only are they reportable (via consumer surveys), but they are also under editorial control. Given the increasingly accepted societal norm of 'it's good to be green', one distinct possibility is that, in an attempt to present themselves in a more socially acceptable way, consumers may report explicit attitudes that are not necessarily a genuine reflection of their attitude. If consumers are indeed explicitly exaggerating their green credentials then the presence of an attitude-behaviour gap in green consumerism is hardly surprising. But what if consumer choice is driven, not just by one, but by two distinct types of attitude?

Indeed, recent psychological research has demonstrated that by focusing exclusively on explicit attitudes we are measuring

only part of the consumer psyche. As well as attitudes operating at the explicit level, we also hold unconscious or implicit attitudes that elude both introspection and conscious control. Given their unconscious nature, implicit attitudes are not reportable in the same way as their explicit counterparts, yet they guide behaviour nonetheless. In particular, the predictive role of implicit attitudes is particularly salient for automatic behaviours, such as consumer choice. Consider, for example, the supermarket environment: There are thousands of products lining the shelves but consumers do not consciously scan every single product and make deliberate and reflective decisions before putting an item in their basket. Supermarket shopping is routinely conducted under time pressure and cognitive load where product choice is often quick and automatic. Research suggests that under such conditions, the automatic associations that consumers hold (their implicit attitudes) are more likely to guide consumer choice, rather than their reflective and deliberate explicit attitudes. But how can we measure attitudes that operate outside of conscious awareness?

The Implicit Association Test (IAT), developed by Anthony Greenwald and colleagues as a measure of implicit attitudes, is a computerised classification task using reaction time to measure the strength of a given association. To illustrate, an individual who implicitly associates green products as being 'good' would be quicker to categorise green products into the category 'good' than if they associate green products as being 'bad'. As part of my research at the Sustainable Consumption Institute, we were interested in exploring attitudes towards green products in order to observe any differences in the explicit attitudes that people reported and their implicit attitudes as measured using the IAT. Additionally, we examined the influence of explicit and implicit attitudes on consumer choice. Here, we not only found evidence of divergence between people's explicit and implicit attitudes

towards green products but critically, implicit attitudes were also found to be a superior predictor of consumer choice. In other words, implicit not explicit attitudes were influencing consumer choice.

The real-world implications of this research are two-fold and may go some way to explaining the current attitude-behaviour gap in sustainable consumption. Firstly, some consumers may not be as green as they say or indeed think they are and secondly, if implicit attitudes are not sufficiently 'green' in the first place then it is unlikely that consumers will actually

engage in sustainable patterns of consumption. Consequently, we cannot continue to focus solely on what consumers explicitly say if we are to fully understand consumer attitudes and how they influence consumer choice. We therefore need to urgently consider how to mobilise the adoption of greener patterns of consumption, by augmenting implicit attitudes to green products and behaviours, if we are to genuinely engineer a revolution in green consumption.

Laura Sale is a Research Associate at the Sustainable Consumption Institute at the University of Manchester.



Photo: Leo Prieto

## Embedding sustainability through choice-editing



Thomas Jelley is Corporate Citizenship manager at Sodexo

If choice is the ultimate luxury, food provides seemingly endless indulgent opportunities for (relatively affluent) consumers worldwide. However, their market signals are (a) increasingly widely acknowledged as those of short term personal gratification, and (b) often at the expense of longer term personal health and wellbeing, not to mention broader socio-environmental sustainability. The overwhelming combination of positive time preferences, weak empathic responses over time and space plus imperfect knowledge, arguably turns 'consumer choice' into 'a stab in the dark'.

Question: what rational consumer would willingly choose to eat an imbalanced diet to long term personal detriment knowing that the planet's bio-physical limits cannot sustain it? Answer: one that is still physiologically programmed in evolutionary terms

to wonder where the next meal is going to come from and who, despite being better connected than ever before, remains meaningfully proximate to no more than about 150 people.

One discrete response to this conundrum is choice-editing in foodservice. This means offering customers the same range of food options as they are used to choosing from but with sustainability attributes embedded. The choices exclude ingredients that are recognised as particularly harmful to health or the environment, but include information and guidance as to the health and environmental attributes of the food served.

What of consumer choice and the wider food system? It is one of the most complex and pressing challenges of the early 21st century; a question of governance that deserves analysis of the sort set out in Berggruen and Gardels' excellent *Intelligent Governance for the 21st Century* (Polity Press).

Consumer choice is neither omniscient nor omnipotent but in desperate need of temperance by a longer term decision making authority underpinned by better informed popular trust.



# The tyranny of choice

## The true cost of food



Making bad food cheap to buy and attractive to consumers is the engine that drives the bad food and farming system, argues **Jeanette Longfield**.

The (almost) obligatory web search will reveal that 'The Tyranny of Choice' is the title of more than one book, as well as the subject of countless articles (including this one!). We all know – don't we? – that the much vaunted 'freedom of choice' in a supposed 'free' market is an illusion, and a dangerous one at that. The endless growth in production, consumption and waste fuelled by 'free' choice is propelling us over an ecological cliff edge. And it doesn't even make us happy.

As Tim Jackson memorably noted, in *Prosperity Without Growth*, "...people are being persuaded to spend money we don't have, on things we don't need, to create impressions that won't last, on people we don't care about". Who among us hasn't stood, almost paralysed for a few moments, staring at shelves crammed with bottled water, biscuits or breakfast cereals (none of which we need) wondering which is the 'best' choice? Then we grab the one that we bought last week, or says something 'green' on the packet and rush off to the next 'choice' feeling vaguely uneasy.

Even the Public Health Minister, Anna Soubry MP, noted in January that something was not quite right with how our food choices are shaped. She noted that an "abundance of bad food" is making our poorest families obese – a welcome acknowledgement of the obesogenic environment long documented by researchers. Unfortunately the minister's recognition of the situation was rather spoiled by going on to praise the feeble voluntary efforts of some members of the food industry as part of the Coalition Government's 'Responsibility Deal'. So far this 'Deal' has simply failed to tackle the avalanche of bad food 'choices' we are faced with every day.

### Make the good food choice the easy choice

Food that is bad for our health, and for the Earth's life support systems that we depend on, is the easy choice. It is readily affordable to everyone except the very poorest. It is available everywhere, with 24 hour supermarket shopping and ready-to-eat food on every high street and in every shopping centre. And it is made to appear very attractive, thanks to a range of sophisticated marketing techniques. Good food, on the other hand, tends to be more expensive (sometimes dramatically so), not always easy to find (so we sometimes have to go somewhere special to get it), and has an image which is often, at best, 'worthy' but usually just dull. Given these obstacles, it is

amazing that anyone makes a good food 'choice'! Some retailers are doing some 'good choice editing' on our behalf, which is helping. The Co-operative has been selling only certified Fairtrade products for some food and drinks for several years. Sainsbury's now sells only free-range eggs in its stores. Some companies are reducing salt in their standard products, so that people's salt intake can go down without them having to look for (and sometimes pay extra for) low-salt products.

This handful of examples highlights the fact that is hiding in plain sight. The food industry does not – and could not – give us an infinite range of products for us to choose 'freely' from. They choose, on our behalf, a range of products to offer us and they decide how they will be priced and how they will be marketed, right down to where they will be on which shelf. This is not to say that customer choice is irrelevant to food industry, and significant amounts of cash are spent trying to find out what we can be persuaded to buy. But this research is considered alongside profitability, reliable supplies, what competitors are doing and so on. Only rarely, unfortunately, does the 'choice edit' include whether or not the product is good for our health and the planet we live on.

### Internalising the externalities

A powerful way to help us 'choose' more good food would be to make it cheaper than bad food. Currently the costs of bad food – such as ill health, environmental damage and badly paid jobs – are not reflected in the price. Economists call these costs 'externalities', as if these problems existed somehow on another planet somewhere else. Unfortunately they don't, so we are paying for them, either in money (for example in costs of treating diet-related diseases or cleaning up pollution) or in the suffering caused by ill-health or cruel practices in animal farming. We just do not pay for them at the same time we buy the food.

The price of good food, however, does include some of the costs of preventing damage, so it appears to be more expensive. Not using pesticides, for example, is good for wildlife and creates safer jobs, but skilled people cost more than chemicals, so the price of the food is higher. Higher farm animal welfare standards also need well-trained people to care for the animals, and paying for Fairtrade standards, while supporting poor farmers, also increases costs. For other products, such as

tobacco and alcohol, where the ‘external’ costs are not reflected in the price, governments use fiscal measures like duties to ‘internalise’ them. This not only makes the price a better indicator of the costs to society as a whole but also, if the duty is high enough, discourages people from buying the product and reduces the damage done by using it. Governments all over the world are now using, or considering using a similar approach with some aspects of bad food. For several years a number of US states have taxed sugary drinks and France recently did so. Hungary introduced a levy on fatty foods and Denmark briefly did so before being pressured by the food industry to remove it.

**Making the food system fairer**

In January Sustain published a report, ‘A Children’s Future Fund – How food duties could provide the money to protect children’s health and the world they grow up in’, proposing a duty of 20p per litre of sugary drinks which could raise around £1billion. It also proposed that, in the longer term, other elements of sustainability – like greenhouse gases, jobs and wildlife - should be considered alongside nutrition when setting a duty on food.

This approach would make bad food more expensive, relative to good food, which would be good for everyone, but particularly so for people on low incomes. As with tobacco and alcohol, it is those on the lowest incomes that suffer the worst health, and die younger from eating junk food. Higher prices for tobacco have already saved thousands of lives, and proposals for higher prices for alcohol, and now for food, should do the same.



Photo: Bruno Girin

Better yet would be to spend the majority of the money raised from food duties on measures to improve children’s future health and well-being. Sustain estimated that the sugary drinks duty would raise around £1billion, which would pay for – for example - free and good quality school meals for all schoolchildren. Research results from those local councils that have introduced free school meals have shown not only that all children do better at school when they have a good meal inside them, but also that children from low income families benefit proportionately more. This means that the revenue from food duties, spent well, could help to make society fairer – a vital and often under-emphasised element of sustainability.

**Siren voices**

It’s not all about price though. Arguably, making bad food attractive is the engine that drives the bad food and farming system. Marketing can be so powerful that people can be persuaded to happily pay for products like bottled water when its equivalent can be obtained virtually free from the taps. Many countries, including the UK, already accept that children should be protected from marketing, not only for bad food but also from marketing in general. This is mainly because children are, by definition, not mature enough to know that they are being exploited for commercial gain. It is also accepted that children should be protected from marketing for harmful products, and junk food is widely agreed to be in this category.

Thanks to vigorous campaigning over several years by a large alliance of organisations and concerned citizens, it is no longer legal in the UK to advertise junk food during children’s TV programmes or put branded bad food products in TV programmes. Unfortunately, junk food companies continue to target children in the growing range of other media, such as via Facebook and Twitter, and on websites, as well as through sponsorship deals with children’s sporting and entertainment heroes. The Children’s Food Campaign is therefore still working with its huge network of supporters, not only to close these loopholes but also make sure the rules are rigorously monitored and enforced.

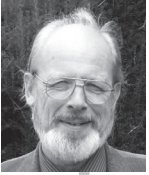
As with pricing, protecting children from junk food marketing is good for all children, but benefits poorer children the most. Low income families can least afford the price premium of branded products, but children from poorer families are often the most sensitive to being teased or even bullied for having the ‘wrong’ brand – whether that’s food or clothes or other products.

But what about marketing to adults? If good food companies and bad food companies had similar amounts of money to spend on marketing, is it right to argue that adults just have to deal with the tyranny of choice? At the moment this is purely hypothetical, given that the marketing budgets of multinational food companies are larger than the GDP of some small countries, so we are simply surrounded by marketing for bad food. But would “good” advertising for good products (such as food) reinforce materialism and continue pushing us towards the edge of the ecological cliff? Ask me again if we get there. ■

Jeanette Longfield is Co-ordinator of Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming. *A Children’s Future Fund – How food duties could provide the money to protect children’s health and the world they grow up in* is available to download from: <http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/info/263>

# Food choice

## Ethical dimensions



As rational individuals, the choice of what we eat – which normally entails our most intimate relationship imaginable with the external environment – clearly has significant ethical dimensions, writes **Ben Mephram**.

### Food choice: a fundamental right?

We can readily imagine instances in which denying someone the right to choose what they consume would be morally outrageous: for example, forcing most people to eat human flesh, or a vegan to consume meat, or starving anyone by intentionally withholding food. But as the legal maxim has it: 'hard cases make bad law.' So to consider how ethics is usually relevant to food choices we need to address the issue in a more realistic way. My aim here is to explore the overall territory of ethical food choices by considering how generally accepted ethical principles impact on the ways we conduct our everyday living. It is not the intention to preach, scaremonger or gloss over difficult choices, but rather to identify the consequences of our declared intentions if we have resolved to eat 'ethically': and to briefly suggest an aid to reasoned deliberation.

The focus is on supermarkets, where over 70% of UK food purchases are currently made.

Let's start with some basic facts. Although we all need food regularly, it is often eaten in circumstances when, despite the best intentions, it is almost impossible to guarantee that the standards we vouch for are on offer. A snack from a motorway service station, pester-pressure from an exasperating child who might be placated by a garish confection, the limited choice at an out-of-town minimarket – all are liable to undermine the discriminating eater's ethical intentions. Others who usually have limited choices include poorer people, those with little understanding of nutritional needs, and children whose food choices are made by others. In fact, food preparation and food distribution in the form of prepared meals often deny consumers any realistic opportunity of making informed choices; and probably in most cases where food is provided in family or institutional settings, no conscious efforts are made to discern the provenance of the meals' constituents.

### Consumer sovereignty

A major ethical concern here is consumer sovereignty, which refers to individuals' status in respect of their informed choices over what they eat – the term implicitly echoing the time-honoured aphorism 'the consumer is king.' It is in fact just one aspect of the broader concept of autonomy, a major element of human rights. In relation to food, there are strong reasons why consumer sovereignty demands explicit respect. After all, food can profoundly affect consumers' wellbeing; not only in the short-term but also in the complex ways nutrition interacts with other factors, such as individual genetic predispositions to disease. But the low precision with which outcomes can be forecast means that informed food choices are intrinsically difficult. From the perspective of marketing ethics, three general principles are customarily taken to define consumer sovereignty viz. the consumer should have: i) a choice of goods, provided by competition; ii) the capability to understand the products and any associated risks; and iii) sufficient information to judge how expectations of the goods are satisfied.<sup>1</sup> Understanding whether these principles have been adequately respected is sometimes straightforward (such as PYO fruit from a local farm), but others are more problematical as with manufactured (processed) foods, such as packaged cakes, beef burgers and sweetened drinks.

### Choice

But let's begin with a seemingly straightforward case, in which a mature, rational and generally well-educated supermarket shopper, but with limited time, wants to make a sound choice of a breakfast cereal for her young children. Presented with a wide range of packages, bearing not only nutritional data in small print, but also prominent declarations of 'a healthy start to the day,' and 'added vitamins,' and embellished with colourful images likely to appeal to children, how often is

Photo: Simon Gray



she able to reach a sound ethical decision? Only, it must be suspected, very rarely. This is because many of the products on the shelves, without their distinctive packaging, are almost identical in nutrient content – so that the apparent choice actually amounts to one between the promotional skills of rival advertising departments.

### Capability

If they were all nutritionally well-balanced that might not have adverse consequences, but such cereals mostly have very high contents of sugar, fat and salt – which are predisposing factors to obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes.<sup>2</sup> Claims that breakfast is an important meal for children, that fibre aids digestion and that vitamin fortification is advantageous, may all be true in isolation, but they are often totally nullified by the adverse effects identified. So, our conscientious shopper, looking to do the best for her children, but vulnerable to powerful marketing skills, is all too likely to choose unwisely. Risks of similarly adverse effects are also associated with many other foods. Fast food, including chips, sausages and pizzas, are all appetising not only to young children but also to older children and adults, doubtless influenced by peer-group

pressure, but are similarly liable to contain unhealthy amounts of sugar, fat and/or salt. The UK government's recent decision to use TV advertising to promote healthier eating habits, as part of the NHS Change4Life campaign, has received mixed reactions, with some organisations considering it far too little to be effective.<sup>3</sup>

### Information

If food choices are to illustrate free, informed decisions they clearly need to be made as a consequence of adequate knowledge and genuine understanding of the options available, and free from pressures that might undermine rational decision-making. Such conditions might well exist when the quality of a food is largely apparent simply from its appearance and well-known provenance, for example when purchased regularly from a trusted farmer at a local farmers market. However, for manufactured foods the situation is very different. Recent developments in the global food industry are characterised by terms such as 'agribusiness' and 'food processing,' in which traditional links between agricultural raw materials and food products have been progressively eroded as farm products are reduced to simple industrial inputs in

the forms of proteins, carbohydrates and fats. These inputs are then reconstituted in manufactured foods, which from a commercial point of view possess many advantages, including longer shelf-life, convenience in processing and standardised composition.

Nowadays, most supermarket shoppers probably believe they have a very wide choice of new food products, formulated by novel processing techniques that impart the products with 'added value' – a term that actually refers to their increased commercial profitability. But, according to Roberts, "as production has become almost entirely automated, with vegetables diced, meats ground, batters mixed, doughs extruded, and ready-to-serve dinners assembled, all by computer-controlled robots at rates of thousands of units per minute, the food itself has had to be amended, often significantly, to tolerate the process."<sup>4</sup> One very significant development is the use of food additives, which serve to repair the damage done to the food during manufacturing – with artificial colours added to restore those lost in cooking and pulverising, and synthetic flavours used to replace easily damaged natural flavours. Additives also allow manufacturers to economise on the cost of natural ingredients by avoiding the problem of their frequently limited supply.

### Globalisation and its problems

The fact that many ingredients of manufactured foods are now sourced globally means that, in 2008, constituents of the average plate of food in Europe and North America had travelled about 1500 miles before being eaten,<sup>5</sup> a development facilitated by the use of additives that allow the shelf-lives to be extended considerably. While benefits of international food trade, for both consumers and producers (for example in less developed countries) can be substantial, there are obvious disadvantages (such as food miles contribute to global warming).

Globalisation of food supply certainly does not benefit all the parties in food purchases in the manner 18th century economist Adam Smith envisaged when he wrote of the benign effects of the "hidden hand of the market." This is largely because global food trade does not operate on anything like a level playing field.<sup>6</sup> For example, an oligopoly of companies in the USA dominates world trade in corn, wheat, sugars and ethanol. According to the brochures of Cargill, one of the biggest companies, "We buy, trade, transport, mill, crush, process, refine, season, distribute around the clock, around the globe. ... We are the flour in your bread, the wheat in your noodles, the salt in your fries, the sweetener in your soft drink."<sup>7</sup>

It is doubtful whether most supermarket shoppers are even vaguely aware of the circumstances in which much of their food has been produced. Food marketing is a highly skilled process, employing expertise derived from developments in the social sciences, psychology, anthropology, neurosciences, economics and computing – skills which are aimed at persuading consumers to make purchases they would otherwise avoid. So the idyllic scenes of cattle grazing in meadows overlooking ivy-clad village churches, that often adorn the packaging of dairy

products, rarely bear any relation to the realities of modern globally-sourced food production!

### Beyond the supermarket shelf

If we re-consider the three principles of marketing ethics identified, in reality for most people, choice is often illusory because the plethora of products with different brand names have very similar compositions. Capability to understand the global food system is challenged especially with manufactured food because of the sheer complexity of the food chains and their oligopolistic nature. While even when appropriate information is accessible it is often very difficult to understand because of its highly technical nature, for instance some food additives have widely unrecognised effects on health (sometimes promoting cancer, obesity and/or allergies) and all entail obligatory experiments on animals in their testing.<sup>8</sup> One way responsible retailers have responded to consumer wishes to raise the overall ethical standards is by choice editing, so that products failing to meet these standards are not stocked. Customers might then feel confident that they can trust the system devised and its operators. Sales of such foods have increased substantially in recent years (UK spending on 'ethical food and beverage products' trebled between 1999 and 2008 to £6 million p.a.).<sup>9</sup> These products are defined in terms of eleven categories, which include organic and fair-trade food, free-range eggs and poultry, and Freedom Foods. But there are serious disagreements over whether some of these categories should feature in an 'ethical' list.

A major concern is that choice editing might be considered an easy opt-out, whereby customers can 'buy their way out' of ethical decisions (rather as medieval potentates paid priests to say prayers for forgiveness of their sins!) Moreover, although consumer sovereignty is often considered solely in relation to the nature of a food product on the supermarket shelf, such as knowing whether it is safe to eat and nourishing, important as these criteria are they by no means define ethical concerns in their entirety.

### Food choice reconsidered

For applied ethicists concerned with the practical implications of otherwise frequently-abstruse philosophical theory, it is often helpful to characterise ethical concerns in terms of the respect due to three principles – autonomy, wellbeing and fairness, as they impact on the interests of all affected interest groups. According to this approach, for 'ethically sound' decision-making due account needs to be taken not only to secure provision of safe, nutritious food, but also to ensure the food is produced and marketed under conditions that respect the interests of others.

More specifically, respect for autonomy is important not only for consumer sovereignty but also for those who work in the food industry (farmers, retailers and hauliers for example) and for farm animals, whose freedom to follow species-specific behavioural instincts might be considered their right. Respect for wellbeing not only concerns consumer health but also that of people producing and marketing the food, animals that provide it (often by being slaughtered) and the biotic environment (which provides the essential infrastructure, but

Figure 1

Respect for: ↓ + →	AUTONOMY (e.g. CHOICE)	WELLBEING (HEALTH & WELFARE)	FAIRNESS (JUSTICE)
PEOPLE IN AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY	Managerial freedom	Satisfactory incomes & working conditions	Fair trade laws & practices
CONSUMERS	Informed food choices	Food safety & quality of life	Availability at affordable prices
FARM ANIMALS	Behavioural freedom	Animal welfare	Animal rights
THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT	Biodiversity	Conservation	Sustainability

**Suggested ethical matrix to help customers make ethically sound food choices**

In the 12 cells with the dark grey background, respect for the ethical principles in the top row is specified for each of the interest groups listed in the left-hand column. All 12 specifications are considered as ideals, which it will only rarely be possible to attain (see link 1, below). With computerised versions of this matrix, clicking on each cell could allow motivated customers to obtain on-screen information that would help them make their own ethical decisions (e.g. see link 2 below). For example, some people would prioritise concern for farm workers in developing countries, others for animal welfare or food safety. Balancing such priorities ('taking everything into account') is intrinsic to making sound choices. Would responsible supermarkets be prepared to provide such facilities in stores and online?

**Links:**

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2. Mepham B & Tomkins S (2003) Ethics and animal farming: <http://www.ethicalmatrix.net>

is often damaged by intensive practices). Fairness is important in terms of the equitable distribution of rewards and risks to workers, consumers, farm animals and the environment. In the light of these considerations, we perhaps need to reconsider what choice amounts to in ethical terms. The very notion of consumer sovereignty might imply that choice is the most important ethical consideration, and certainly the recent emphasis on personalisation (insisting one should be free to choose one's hospital, children's school and energy provider) is now almost considered an incontestable right.

But before we get too carried away, it's worth considering what this implies. After all, it would be quite reasonable to coin such terms as 'the sovereignty of fairness' and 'the sovereignty of wellbeing.' It would then be readily apparent that there is no reason why consumers, especially the already privileged, should necessarily prioritise food choice. For satisfying one's personal choice is hardly 'ethical' if it entails limiting the choices of others, or harming them in other ways. Indeed, 'harm to others' might reasonably be interpreted broadly as lack of respect for their autonomy, wellbeing and fair treatment. So, aiming to act ethically is clearly not a matter of following a simple check list of dos and don'ts.

Most ethically well-intentioned people appreciate the value of appealing to the above principles in arriving at ethical food choices. But there can be no absolute ethical judgment on such matters, because each of us will doubtless arrive at a distinctive position on the relative significance of the different principles as they affect different interests. To this end, the ethical matrix

(see Figure), a conceptual tool I introduced in the 1990s, proposes that an authentic ethical analysis of any food process or product is often facilitated by considering the implications of these different principles in a broad context. Although it is not possible even to outline the matrix adequately here, it is described in an online chapter and an interactive web-based exercise, which are both freely accessible (see Figure 1).

One way to help consumers perform their own ethical analyses (and act more autonomously) might be for supermarkets, and others, to provide computerised versions of the ethical matrix, accessible both in-store and on-line, to seek to justify – and invite comments on – their choice editing. Facilitating the process of ethical deliberation by this means would entail much input from both experts and the general public, but it is proposed here as a possible way forward in promoting sound ethical food choices.

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# New fashioned values

## Post-crunch consumers resolve to waste less



**Justin King** reports that shoppers increasingly understand that choosing to waste less food is good for their pockets and the environment. He explains how Sainsbury's is encouraging its customers to make that choice, and how it is getting its own house in order.

In 2013, as people yet again tighten their belts for another budget conscious year, we're seeing an ongoing resolution amongst consumers to waste less. Difficult economic times have meant we all need to work harder and think more carefully to make our resources go further. Yet far from causing a dip in values, this has triggered a set of new, positive shopping behaviours amongst consumers across all socio-economic groups.

It's part of a trend we're calling 'new fashioned values' - a rediscovery of the ways of previous generations in response to today's challenges. So whilst our parents and grandparents said "waste not, want not", today we look to reduce, reuse and recycle to avoid waste in response to environmental concerns as well as from an economic point of view. It's a move from conspicuous consumption to savvy sustainability.

Food waste is an excellent case in point. Since 2007, consumers have been throwing away less food. WRAP estimates over one million tonnes less waste a year, saving an estimated £2.5 billion. But there is still more to go for. Our research shows 7 in 10 households are still throwing away food unnecessarily. So we're more focused than ever on providing ways for our customers to make their food go further. This includes meal planners and tips on how to store and re-use leftovers, and through our most recent 'Make Your Roast Go Further' campaign helping them to create two additional family meals from every Sunday roasting joint.

We've also significantly increased the size of 'Use By' dates and changed our freezer guidance to encourage customers to freeze food up to the 'Use By' date. I've even made a personal contribution to the issue - suggesting a new type of cookware. It's an oven proof dish that comes with a vacuum seal lid, and is ideal for preserving leftover cottage pie or apple crumble. It's selling well, tapping into people's willingness to cook more from scratch, and throw less away. New fashioned values at work!

We've also taken this thinking into our own operations. Last year we responded to one of the worst growing seasons farmers have experienced in decades by changing our approach to ugly' fruit and vegetables allowing food that



would previously been wasted to be sold. None of our food waste goes to landfill - instead we donate any surplus food to charities and any waste to anaerobic digestion and the generation of renewable energy. It's a closed loop that has financial as well as environmental benefits. And we've got a well developed programme incorporating new technologies such as solar energy into our stores to generate renewable energy - saving money, as well as resources.

So I very much see these New Fashioned Values as something to be embraced. They are, I believe, here to stay and both companies and individuals have the potential to make a big difference, both to their own budgets and to the balance sheet of natural resources.

**Justin King** is Chief Executive of Sainsbury's

# GMOs in animal feed

## A lottery for UK consumers



When it comes to GM, consumers don't really have the choice to avoid it. **Pete Riley** argues the case for clear labelling on meat, milk, eggs and fish produced from animals reared on GM feed.

The discovery of horsemeat in the UK and Irish food chain sparked a heated debate about our right to know what's in our food. The companies involved in the horsemeat incident recognised the potential for reputational damage when customers realised their products contained meat from animals we consider to be pets, and they took prompt action to withdraw the products from sale. Tesco took out full-page adverts in national newspapers to apologise. Some people might be happy to buy cheap horse burgers, but the fact that no one knew, meaning labelling law was violated and choice denied, was rightly noted as important by many commentators.

Labels for GM use in food has generated similar debate, especially in countries without mandatory GM labels like the US. But even in the UK we still do not have labels to ensure we know where GM has been used in the food chain. Choice is promised but denied. Consumers in the US have been denied choice since GM crops were first approved in the mid 1990s because no GM ingredients are labelled. However the demand for a clear choice and transparency has always been there. In the ballot on Proposition 37 to introduce mandatory GM labelling in California in November 2012, the big food and biotech companies invested US\$45 million to secure just 51.4% of the vote and narrowly defeat it.<sup>1</sup>

In the UK during the late 1990s, many people faced with foods carrying GM labels chose to vote with their wallets. They stopped buying the likes of Sainsburys/Safeway GM tomato puree and Unilever's Bean Feast to avoid GM. Consumers gave many reasons for their boycotts. Some people were worried about the safety of GM food, others were concerned about

GM's environmental impacts, others were concerned that GM was controlled by a handful of global corporations and others had ethical objections to the transfer of genes between species. Some shared all these concerns. British supermarkets responded swiftly to consumer demand and withdrew all GM ingredients from their own brand products. Most food manufacturers followed suit. Fifteen years later these bans remain in place.

European regulators and politicians responded to the advent of GM by passing labelling legislation. By 2003 any food or animal feed with an ingredient from a GM crop had to be labelled. These requirements apply to all ingredients regardless of whether they contain detectable GM protein/DNA or not. For instance processed products, such as vegetable oil, lecithin, starch and maize syrup, all need a GM label. The rules also apply to catering establishments and restaurants, so if your chip shop or school canteen uses GM soya oil in its fryers, it should tell you so clearly, for instance with a note on menus.

While GM labelling law applies to animal feed, it does not apply to meat, milk, eggs and fish produced from animals reared on that feed. The EU imports around 41.4 million tonnes of soya beans, meal and oil per year from the US, Argentina and Brazil, and the UK imports around a million tonnes of this each year. There are strong markets in the EU and UK for non-GM animal feed, and Brazil exports a large quantity of certified non-GM commodities to meet this demand. There is scope for Brazil to supply even more non-GM soya if non-GM farmers can be assured the costs of gaining certification will be covered – they need to know supermarkets will continue to require non-GM-fed products to make the investment worth their while.





Despite the fact GM feed has been used for years, it remains hidden from consumers. While some supermarkets apply their non-GM policy to animal feed as well as ingredients, shoppers will find precious few products on UK shelves with a label that says so. In the UK Marks & Spencer has a strong position, with many lines clearly non-GM fed, while Asda and Morrisons have the weakest policies of the UK's major retailers. Other UK supermarkets also have non-GM fed lines, and GM Freeze maintains an up-to-date list of animal products produced without GM (see [www.gmfreeze.org/why-freeze/unwanted/where-buy-non-gm-fed/](http://www.gmfreeze.org/why-freeze/unwanted/where-buy-non-gm-fed/)). The message to shoppers is clear: it pays to ask before you buy if you want to keep GM out of your trolley.

UK supermarkets often claim they have to use GM feed because non-GM isn't available. Yet in France Carrefour, one of the world's biggest food retailers, uses non-GM fed labels on many products, and Campina, one of the biggest dairy companies, tells its German customers when products are 'ohne Gentechnik' ('without biotechnology'). Clearly these companies have secured steady supplies of non-GM feed, so

it is difficult to understand why UK supermarkets cannot do so as well. UK supermarkets also resist putting non-GM fed labels on their animal products, often claiming that GM DNA and protein are broken down in the gut and do not pass into the bodies of livestock and poultry – since no GM is present, no label is needed, or so the argument goes. This was the Food Standards Agency position for many years, but research has shown that GM DNA is detectable in the animal tissue, as is non-GM DNA, and this is now reflected in FSA advice. EU-funded research announced in spring 2012 also suggests that some GM proteins can pass from the gut into mammalian tissue.<sup>2</sup> GM DNA from animal feed could be in our food.

The case for labelling animal products to show consumers where the GM is, and isn't, now extends from ethical, environmental and animal welfare concerns to the possible presence of GM protein in those foods. Public support for such labelling is strong, and it has been for years. In a poll carried out for GM Freeze and Friends of the Earth in 2010, 89% of respondent backed labelling of meat, dairy, eggs and fish.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore 72% said they would pay 2p/kg and 0.5p/litre extra to avoid GM.

Table 1

Statement	True (net)	False (net)	Don't know / no opinion (net)	Real answer
GM food is widely on sale in the UK	54%	15%	31%	False – GM foods are not widely sold and labelled goods are not common
GM crops are widely being grown by farmers in the UK	66%	6%	28%	False there are no GM crops grown commercially in the UK. In 2012 there were just two GM test sites.
Farmers in the UK use animal feed that contains ingredients from GM plants	54%	6%	40%	This is true but many animal products are still produced without GM feed.

In January 2013 the FSA published its own qualitative and quantitative research giving similar findings on consumer demand for GM labelling, but the research also showed consumer confusion about where GM is currently used.<sup>4</sup> Given that GM-fed animal products are not labelled, products with legally-required GM labels are hard to find because consumers reject them. In addition, there have been very few GM test sites in the UK, so it is not surprising that people are confused about where, how and what GM is being used in the UK. Table 1 gives an indication of shoppers' understanding on these issues.

## Despite the fact GM feed has been used for years, it remains hidden from consumers

Despite this obvious confusion, not helped by the failure of the FSA and supermarkets to keep people informed, support for labelling GM fed animal products was strong, with around two thirds of respondents backing it. There was also strong support for labelling all aspects of GM in the food chain, including the use of GM rennet in cheese making, and participants supported labels on products produced without GM, as well as clear labels on packs stating if products contained GM or not. The findings regarding how people might respond to labels were less clear cut and, as would be expected, price was found to influence the possible choices.

It is clear people want clear labelling of GM content across the board so they can choose, if they so wish, to avoid GM, just as they also want to know if horsemeat is used in burgers even if it is safe. So why have UK or EU politicians not delivered a comprehensive labelling system for all GM use in the food chain that includes animal products? The European Parliament has failed, by a very small margin, to approve such measures on at least three occasions. The last time was in 2010 when it was Conservative MEP's negative votes which resulted in it being defeated on the same day David Cameron pledged in an answer to a Parliamentary Question: "We should also be guided by what consumers want, and it is vital that we have accurate labelling. That will really be the key to ensuring that we make progress with this issue in a way that keeps the public

on side and allows them to understand what it is that they are buying and consuming."<sup>5</sup>

The last Conservative manifesto pledged to bring in "clear labelling for non-GM foods",<sup>6</sup> but this was cut in the Coalition Agreement. The Labour Governments failed to back such legislation when they had the chance. The reasons offered to justify a failure to provide the public with accurate GM labelling usually claim an inability to test products for GM presence or difficulties in traceability, especially for imported products. In the era of global food trading neither excuse stands up. If food retailers and manufacturers are really saying they don't have full traceability in place for their ingredients, wherever they might come from, we need to know urgently. Ensuring the integrity of ingredients through quality control and traceability is an essential legal requirement for food manufacturers and retailers. It is also a business imperative – without full traceability companies run the risk of very damaging product withdrawals and reputational damage. One retailer once told me they could trace a lettuce back to field it was grown in. If this is true it seems unlikely they can't also require farmers to use non-GM feed and back this up with clear paperwork, making labels on meat, milk and eggs a defensible and straight-forward extension of existing GM policy. Clearly Carrefour has figured it out.

It is clear people want transparent labelling. If the politicians can't agree about GM labels on animal products surely some of our leading retailers can give their customers what they want? The company that goes first will enjoy a clear market advantage, as well as a boost in customer satisfaction. ■

Pete Riley is campaign director of GM Freeze

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Photo: Global Crop Diversity Trust

## Building common ground on agri-food research



**Tom Wakeford** is a co-convenor of Our Food and Director of the Community Participation in Professional Practice course at the University of Edinburgh.

On a cold winter's day in Gateshead last week, Marian Bailey – a member of the Our Food project – told me: “These TV cooking shows are all fine, but for the busy families who live near me, supermarket meals that you just heat and serve are a life-saver.” In her terms, she was right. But people's food choices today are constrained by lifestyles and employment practices not of their own creation.

Our Food is a new venture that aims to give citizens the opportunity to imagine new relationships with food and the ways it is produced, processed and marketed. At present, the industrial intensification of food production is typically presented as the only sensible way forward at national conferences and workshops organised by the NFU, DEFRA and the Research Councils. As voices from the “green” or “organic” movements are relegated to their own exclusive events, it often seems as though the two sides in the “food wars” are moving ever further apart.

To counter this pointless stalemate, the strategy behind Our Food is to build a community of practice in the UK around food

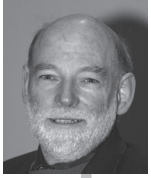
research involving community groups, the Co-op, research centres such as Coventry's Centre for Agroecology and Food Security, and research funders such as BBSRC. Drawing on tools of conflict transformation developed in Latin America, the initiative is bringing together different perspectives, including those from both sides of the genetically modified food controversy. Like our international sister project, the Democratising Agricultural Research initiative, we aim to build enough common ground for a new collaborative model of agri-food research to emerge, one in which a wide range of citizens are enabled to become shapers of the future agricultural system.

Our Food is issuing an open invitation to all those involved in choices around food and agricultural research to come and join us in this process of bridge-building through dialogue. Whether we have complete faith or deep scepticism about particular technological futures, it is time to break down the barriers and join with wider society in dialogue. Such conversations could rebuild our trust in the power of constructive debate and foster vital research into sustainable and health-promoting food systems.

Before too long, Marian's neighbours could find that the choice of feeding themselves a healthy diet is a real one, not something they can only see on TV.

# Global patent regimes

## Hobson's choice



It's not just at the checkout that choice is curtailed – closing down choices can be traced right back to the backroom deals done at international trade negotiations. Geoff Tansey investigates.

Choice is about power – and about powerlessness. Much of the discussion around choice focuses on those made by consumers (at least those with the economic power to spend) about what to buy. No money, no choice. Where money is squeezed, choice becomes more and more constrained especially for those affected by fixed costs and falling incomes who find that the only area of their budget they can cut is food.

Yet even where there is enough money for people to make choices, a huge set of interests operate to influence and constrain those choices. Some surround the information available to allow informed choice. Others surround the ability to define what words mean in ways that are different from how the ordinary person interprets them.

One such is the legal definition of, and shoppers' understanding of, the meaning of the term 'meat', with one meaning for fresh and another for what can be included in processed meat products. The rhetoric of consumer choice is shown to be just that when it comes to labelling the processes involved in producing or bringing food to the point of sale. In some areas, and some countries, you can have a choice about the nature of the trade relationships involved – such as fair trade. Yet even here the information available only relates to the primary producers, not whether the rest of the people along the distribution and marketing chain have behaved fairly in the pricing and not increased their margins. Would it be fair, for example, for a retailer to increase the profit margin on a fair trade product compared to a similar one not fairly traded because of a belief that the customer would pay more? Not in my view.

When it comes to labelling genetically engineered foods, there have been and continue to be battles royal to prevent their labelling (notably in the US), as well as inventing terms such as 'substantial equivalence' to prevent assessment of such products. Both make informed choice impossible.

## If you can frame the rules in your interest, you are able to shape the choices people can make

There are other and bigger issues around choice for consumers however. Increasingly, some researchers say, the issue of what to research and where to put the creative energy of researchers is constrained by what they are allowed to bid for, rather than allowing them look at the issues of most concern to them and the public or small farmers. Behind the constraints in research lie bigger changes in the legal frameworks' governing factors affecting the nature and direction of innovation. If you can frame the rules in your interest, you are able to shape the choices people can make without them necessarily realising it.

In the distant and sometimes secretive world of international negotiations there is a stark difference between informed choices freely made and the coercive bargaining that passes

for international negotiations that most of us see little of. Yet these rules affecting our lives (for example on patents) are increasingly negotiated globally. And as resentment from those historically and contemporarily coerced grows, we need to know more. One agreement was described to me by a negotiator from a rich northern country as “the most iniquitous agreement ever signed between rich and poor countries”. Ha Joon Chang, the Cambridge economist talked of how it “kicked away the ladder” that the now rich countries used in their development.

So what is it? The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which is just one of over 20 agreements that make up the package of agreements all countries had to sign up to when they became founding members of or subsequently join the World Trade Organisation. The issues it deals with are a major stumbling block in climate change negotiations, as well as in negotiations over plant genetic resources and biodiversity.

TRIPS requires all countries to have minimum standards of protection for a range of areas including copyright, trademarks, patents and plant variety protection. These various ‘rights’ are in reality privileges granted to some to exclude others from use of their works in return for some perceived societal benefit. They create scarcity where there is none. Historically, countries have adopted some and not others, had different rules governing their definition, terms and use depending upon their national economic interest.

## In trade negotiations, incommensurables are traded in a form of coercive poker

Gone are those days thanks to TRIPS, which extends the reach of these rules deep down into food and farming. Moreover the rules are embedded in an organisation which has a mandatory dispute settlement procedure backed by sanctions. These various privileges affect access to medicines, seeds, knowledge, technology, market structures and the distribution of wealth and power in the 21st century. They are subtly changing research agendas and the way research and development (R&D) is being done, and the questions asked. The net result is that research is now more geared to seeking solutions that can be protected by patents or other privileges, rather than solutions that can be freely shared.

Did developing countries want them? No. Some tried to prevent their inclusion in WTO and failed. Their choice was curtailed by packing TRIPS rules into a buy-one buy-all deal that led to the creation of WTO, rather than discuss them in the existing UN World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) also in Geneva, but where nation states can sign up to agreements as and when they wish and which has no binding

dispute settlement procedure backed by sanctions. In trade negotiations, incommensurables are traded in a form of coercive poker. The four major industries whose business models are threatened by recent scientific advance and technological change – music, film, software, pharmaceuticals/life sciences – and which have global markets, wanted global rules. They got together in the 1980s to organise and lobby for these rules and got their governments to push them through.

The most high profile and immediate effect of the global patent regimes has been on access to medicine and high priced branded HIV-AIDS drugs (accessibly explored in a new film *Fire in the Blood*). The struggles and effects seen in this area are a portent of things to come in farming, as the effects of TRIPS – and its subsequent expansion through bilateral trade negotiations – come to be felt more widely and as the Pharma model for R&D is expanded into food and farming.

Today, as leading expert on global business regulation and intellectual property Professor Peter Drahos of the Regulatory Institutions Network at the Australian National University argues, the global patent system provides a basis for a system of private taxation by large corporate interests in which we have more or less no say.

Professor Drahos says that, “The patent rules we have today are the product of a partnership between big business networks and captured political elites. What the publics of the world need are systems driven either by genuine competition that benefit them as consumers (for example, cheaper pharmaceuticals) or systems driven by cooperation and sharing of important resources (for example, genetic resources) that produce real public goods. Instead governments in the name of innovation have enacted patent rules that enable multinationals to collect huge private taxes, often for products the research for which was at least partly paid out of the public purse. The very idea that private global patent monopolies are somehow the guardians of innovation is an example of Orwell’s doublethink. It really is time to begin thinking clearly about how to change this system.”

Some things are changing. Developing countries, especially the larger ones, are now standing up more strongly for what is in their interest. So too are many civil society organisations and some scientists. These are a few of the reasons why ‘progress’ in WTO has stalled, and climate change negotiations proved so difficult.

Rules made in the interest of a few are constraining the choices and approaches to innovation of the many. Too often internationally, choice has been about the rich getting what they want: they have choice, and not the rest, be they small farmers or poorer states. But choice has to be linked to justice not power. Part of that change is that we need a rethink of how R&D is done, and in whose interests, as well as to ensure there is full knowledge of, and open access to, all research trials begun. ■

Geoff Tansey is a trustee of the FEC and co-edited “The Future Control of Food: A Guide to International Negotiations and Rules on Intellectual Property, Biodiversity and Food Security.”

# Reframing research priorities

## Engaging farmers and citizens



Choices in research are path-dependent, in the sense that today's research findings shape tomorrow's research questions. **Tom MacMillan** explains how the Soil Association is helping farmers to shape the agricultural research agenda.

Many research choices have the potential to shape technology and society, and the opportunities available to farmers, consumers and citizens, over decades to come. The case of cereal breeding shows how important this can be. Most R&D investment over the past few decades has gone towards improving short-straw varieties, to maximise yields in conditions where fertilisers and herbicides have been readily available. Yet, in low external input systems such as organic farming, long-straw varieties are often preferred, as they suppress weeds and have few problems with lodging due to lower nitrogen levels, while the straw is both highly valued for livestock and provides an important carbon source to maintain and build soil organic matter. With breeding efforts heavily focused on short-straw varieties, which have accounted for most of the market, there have been slower rates of improvement in long-straw varieties. The lower average yield in organic compared to non-organic cereal production is thus not only down to agronomy, but also to genetics. As more investment goes towards understanding the genome of short-straw varieties, for example through Rothamsted's 20:20 Wheat programme, cereal production develops further along a path that is premised on high fertility, access to herbicides and low on-farm biomass requirements.

### Winners and losers

This direction affects who wins and loses from R&D. The short-straw varieties may be less relevant to producers who have minimal capital or farm under different conditions, either by choice or by necessity. These include: a minority of UK producers today, including organic producers; the poorest producers in the global south, including some of the people most at risk of food insecurity; and the majority of producers in the UK and globally in future, in scenarios where synthetic fertilisers cost much more than today.

While we can't entirely avoid path-dependency in research and innovation, there are steps we can take to make our choices fairer and more resilient. One is to avoid putting all our eggs in one basket, resisting the temptation to 'pick the winners' in national research strategies and instead actively encouraging diversity. Another is to make sure farmers and the public have a say in the research that is done in their name. The past few months have seen an upsurge in efforts to pin down and promote the research and knowledge needs of UK farmers and growers. These include Feeding the Future (a review of priorities commissioned by RASE, AHDB, the NFU and AIC), the launch of a NERC Knowledge Exchange Programme for sustainable food production and, joint with BBSRC, a new innovation club. By and large, the new initiatives try to co-ordinate the demands of farmers so they become more effective 'research clients', or boost efforts to translate research from academes and journals into language and conversations that directly reach primary producers. Welcome as this is, the lesson from other disciplines and other countries is that we can set our sights higher.

### Research networks

Medical research funding shows how extended peer review can involve those with a stake in science even more fully than respecting their demands as 'clients', valuing the knowledge that users and beneficiaries can bring to decision-making. Perhaps the best-known example is the Alzheimer Society's Research Network. It involves 200 dementia sufferers and their carers directly in shaping a substantial research funding programme, setting research priorities, reviewing applications, sitting on selection panels, monitoring projects and spreading the word. They've run the scheme for years now with a community who face clear challenges in participating, and it seems to be working a treat.

Back in agriculture but in the global south, farmer-led alternatives to traditional extension services suggest there's another way of making sure new knowledge is practically relevant, besides changing the language and locus of discussion. In farmer field schools, the participants learn simple but effective DIY research skills, for example to identify and encourage insects that predate serious pests. The focus here is less on translating research for farmers, than on helping them pick up the language for themselves.

The challenges and opportunities facing agricultural research in the UK are at least as different from those facing the smallholders in Asia, Africa and Latin American who have pioneered farmer field schools, as they are from those facing medical science. Yet, at the Soil Association, we think there are lessons to learn from both these examples. Under our Duchy Originals Future Farming Programme, jointly with the Organic Research Centre and supported by the Prince of Wales's Charitable Foundation, we're experimenting with research funding and knowledge exchange inspired by these approaches.

### Match making

Our new research fund, which announced its first call in January, centres on challenges in sustainable production put forward directly by farmers, ranging from tackling weeds that particularly dog low-input systems to advancing techniques for pasture cropping – drilling the next season's crops directly into the clovers and other plants that build fertility in a rotation. The process match-makes applicants with interested farmers to

design projects together, and involves other farmers alongside scientists in reviewing research proposals. This extended peer review in no way dumbs down the science – the winning research will need to be top-notch scientifically and practically relevant to people at the sharp end. We have also been piloting 'field labs', which help small groups of farmers team up to try techniques and technologies that interest them, and are structured to provide a hands-on crash course in designing effective trials. DIY experiments will never substitute for science, but farmers in the UK test and tinker all the time, so honing their research skills makes more of the time and money they are already investing. We've started eight field labs so far, with producers testing new ways of cracking challenges like maintaining sheep fertility on red clover, reducing antibiotics in dairy and eliminating peat from seed propagation.

The fund and the field labs focus on upping the performance of low-input, agroecological systems – their productivity, environmental benefits and nutritional quality. As organic and non-organic farmers can learn from each, both schemes are open to all. And as they're experiments in their own right, we will be monitoring progress carefully. All being well, they will help farmers shape the research that will influence their management options, markets and livelihoods years later. ■

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*Based on an article first published at [www.foodsecurity.ac.uk](http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk)*

Photo: Rick Harrison





## Supporting sustainability

### Do we really want choice?

**Julia Hailes** explains why Sainsbury's should apply sustainability standards to all the products they sell.

When I challenged Justin King, CEO of Sainsbury's about not applying the same environmental standards across all the products sold through his stores, he replied that he was giving consumers choice. But what sort of choice is this? Do we really want to be worried that when buying branded goods we might be supporting the destruction of rainforests, polluting rivers or worsening climate change? I don't think so.

I applaud Sainsbury's 20 by 20 Sustainability Plan. Justin King explains in the foreword that this is 'a new cornerstone of our business strategy designed to accelerate Sainsbury's commitment to social and environmental responsibility and excellence'. He goes on to explain that the supermarket giant has 21 million customers a week, 150,000 colleagues and over 2000 suppliers. But he doesn't give us an idea of what proportion of transactions are actually impacted by the policy, given that it only applies to Sainsbury's own-brand products. My view is that if a company has values and really believes in what it's doing; the initiatives it takes should apply to all the products they sell. This would signal to consumers that the policies are not just about making money, but about making sure the company is part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Mr King's response to me was to say that "no business in retail will be successful by denying large number of consumers the opportunity to buy what they want." So his view means that he's comfortable with Sainsbury's customers buying environmentally destructive products, if they choose to do so. And this assumes that consumers know about the impacts of the choices they're making, which I'm not convinced they do. Surely, the M&S approach is better. They are in the fortunate position of stocking almost exclusively own-brand products. One advantage of this is that they can apply their environmental and ethical standards right across the board. As a customer, this is rather relaxing. You know that M&S have used their expertise to work out the optimum ethical standards across a range of issues from energy efficiency and

waste minimisation to food miles and animal welfare. And, if you want to know where they stand on these issues you can look on their website.

I probably have a better idea than most about the environmental impacts of the products I buy, but I don't want to worry about each choice I make, when I'm in a store. I'd far rather know that the difficult decisions have been made for me – and that the standards I support have been applied to everything on offer. To be fair, I do feel this when buying fish from Sainsbury's. They have excellent policies on sustainable fishing practices – and they're encouraging their customers to vary the types of fish they buy, to reduce the pressure on the most popular fish species, such as tuna, cod, salmon, haddock and prawns. They're also the largest UK retailer of MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) sustainable fish products. By the end of 2013, they say that around 90% of the wild fish they sell will have MSC certification. If they ever get to 100%, they'll have to admit that this is denying consumers a choice – that's the choice to buy unsustainable fish! Doesn't this show that they really believe in supporting sustainable fishing practices? And, if that's the case, then why not support other sustainability issues with equal vigour?

Don't be fooled by the argument that Sainsbury's can't change the practices of their larger suppliers. They're a huge customer and if they set rigorous environmental standards to all the products they sell, you can be sure that the changes they require will be made. And, as a customer, I would know that they're offering me products and services that I can trust – as they claim in their 20 by 20 Sustainability Plan. I'd also be reassured that they actually believe in what they're doing – and my choice would then be to shop at Sainsbury's. That's a choice worth having. ■

JULIA HAILES, is a campaigning consultant and writer – and former member of the Food Ethics Council. She has written nine environmental books, including the best-selling Green Consumer Guide. [www.juliahales.com](http://www.juliahales.com)





## Making do and getting creative

### Dealing with a lack of food choice

**Riki Therivel** reports from the Oxford Food Bank, where she asks clients how lack of food choice impacts on their cooking practices.

If choice is good, is lack of choice bad? I am a driver for the Oxford Food Bank, and every week I deliver a van-load of food to charities. The food bank has no choice about the food it receives, so neither do our clients. On this week's delivery round to a dozen charities, I interviewed our clients to ask how they choose from a limited food selection, and what happens if they have no choice in what they get from us.

First, some information about food banks. A typical food bank provides non-perishable food from individuals to individuals: for instance members of a church congregation might bring bags of rice and tins of beans to the church, and distribute them to people in need. The Oxford Food Bank is different in that it picks up fresh food from supermarkets and wholesalers, and delivers it to about 30 Oxford charities that serve food.

The food we get is typically near its use-by date, so a fast turnaround is essential: we pick up the food in the afternoon, pack it into crates, and deliver it the next morning. We supplement about 6000 meals per week, and keep 1.5 tonnes per week of food out of the waste stream. Many of our charities get all or most of their food from us.

We get lovely food. In addition to staples like bread and potatoes, we might get dragon fruit, avocados, mooli and salsa. But the only choice that we have as a food bank – and this article won't go into reasons for why we get the food that we do – is whether to take the offered food or leave it. We do leave some food: when it is past its use-by date; meat or fish which requires a much more stringent health and safety regime than we can ask our volunteers to adhere to; when we already have mountains of it; or when we are relatively certain that our clients won't use it all (there is only limited enthusiasm for things like pea shoots and samphire). When we get a lot of food and some is left over after we pack the crates, we take the left-over food along separately in the van, and our clients can choose from that food.

So how do the charities' cooks choose food from the limited selection in our van? They choose food that minimises their costs. Some focus on high-value items: "We use cheese and other dairy products all the time, so I look for them as that keeps our costs down" (drop-in centre for vulnerably housed people). Some maximise the proportion of their meals that comes from the free food bank van, rather than having to be bought: "I look through the van, see what will go together, and choose that. For instance these mushrooms and that soft cheese will make mushrooms with a cheese sauce. We encourage our clients to cook – and to plan their meals around what is available" (mental health service centre).

They choose what they know their clients will eat. "Through trial and error we have found out what our clients like and don't like. We try to choose foods that the clients know" (centre for asylum seekers). Interestingly, this goes both ways. The cook in a hostel for people with substance misuse problems said that her older clients don't like 'foreign muck' and prefer 'meat and two veg'. In contrast a children's centre in an ethnically diverse neighbourhood is happy to take papayas, mangos, chilli peppers and other 'foreign muck' food that is familiar to its clients.

They choose delicious food. The teenagers in the activity centre and the young people's hostel all choose "the food that we like: chips, bread, cheese, yoghurt", "not vegetables, though I'd eat that (one-person sachet of carrots and broccoli)". The cook in a hostel for homeless people looks "for little goodies like pastries".

They choose food that pushes their clients' boundaries. "I choose food that is unusual and that I might not find in the supermarket. Generally I find supermarket choice to be restricted: they don't have weird-shaped vegetables or interesting kales and chards. As a result people have a blinkered view of food. I try to teach people about the food that I cook" (cafe in a community art centre). "We try to

include healthy food like vegetables in our meals. We explain to the parents what is in the food and post simple menus that they could cook at home” (children’s centre).

They choose food that pushes their barriers as cooks. “We like to try new things. For instance last week you convinced us to take a big tub of liquid eggs, and we made omelettes all week. We were saying before you came that we hoped you’d bring more liquid egg so that we can make quiche, so we’re delighted that you brought this tub. That cheese will go nicely in the quiche” (community cafe).

And what happens when there is little or no choice of food? Over the three years of the Oxford Food Bank’s operation, a few charities have signed up with us, started to receive food, and then asked for deliveries to stop. In one homeless shelter whose residents cook for themselves, the residents were unhappy with the quality of the food. A hospice found that our food didn’t fit with its pre-set menus: the sub-cook would have been happy to adapt the menu to the food we provided, but the main cook wasn’t. For these charities, the lack of choice we offer didn’t work. But my interviewees didn’t seem at all fazed by a lack of choice, and coped with it in a variety of ways: They receive a large delivery of staples at the beginning of the week, and use the food bank food to provide variety and colour, so a lack of food bank choice simply restricts their own variety a bit. For instance “We do a big shop on Monday at the supermarket, which gives us the basics for the week. The food bank gives us fresh vegetables to go with the basics” (hostel for homeless people).

They have a stock of recipes that can accommodate a wide variety of inputs, for instance curries, chilli, stir fries and fruit salads. “I just use what is available. We have several simple recipes that we can make with a wide range of vegetables: couscous with bean stew, chilli, pasta with vegetables” (children’s centre).

They have a larder and use food from that. “We have some things in the cupboard like tinned beans and frozen bread, as a backup” (children’s centre); “We freeze some stuff so we can pull that out when we don’t have anything else” (community cafe).

They make do and are creative. Several cooks used the precise words ‘make do’ and ‘creative’, and generally gave the impression that lack of choice was a challenge rather than a constraint. “We take what you give us and organise our meals around that. If there is limited choice, we just make do: our volunteers come up with recipes and we become more creative” (children’s centre). “When there’s not much choice, we make do” (community cafe). “When the choice of food is limited, I just get more creative” (cafe in community art centre). The overriding impression I got from interviewing our clients is how much pride they take in serving varied, healthy, delicious meals on a very limited budget. The professional and volunteer cooks - for instance the parents who cook in the children’s centres - seem to view the restricted budget and limited choice of food that we offer as an interesting challenge rather than a limitation. The charity clients who cook for themselves or take turns cooking for a group seemed to struggle more with a lack of choice: they seem more used to setting menus and shopping for those menus, rather than viewing cooking as a creative act. In all cases, our clients love coming out to the van to see what is available: “We all enjoy not knowing what is coming in and seeing what we can make out of it” (mental health service centre).

In this, the charities we serve are just like we are as individuals. We like surprises, we like to try new things, but much of the time we are happy to stick with tried and tested things. Limited food choice is not necessarily bad, and in our choice-riddled world it may even be a good thing... as long as we have the occasional sweetie thrown in.

Riki Therivel is a trustee and driver for the Oxford Food Bank.



Photo: Oxford Food Bank



**Crop Genetic Resources as a Global Commons**

Michael Halewood, Isabel Lopez Noriega, Selim Louafi  
2013 | Earthscan | ISBN 978-1844078936

The need to maintain both the diversity of and access to the world’s crops genetic resources has never been greater in the face of climate destabilisation. The 43 authors in 19 chapters give a comprehensive, clear and detailed account of how the collective pooling and management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) can be supported through international law. Part one shows the huge interdependence of countries in this area and includes a special chapter on China. Part two examines the key role of the International Treaty on PGRFA and explains the structure and intended function of the multilateral system for facilitated access to PGRFA. While getting the Treaty was a considerable achievement in itself, the third part looks at the various challenges in implementing it, some of the problems that arise from such a negotiated document between states with differing interests, and just where the Treaty fits in the evolving system of conservation and use of PGRFA. GT

**White Bread: A Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf**

Aaron Bobrow-Strain | 2013 | Beacon Press  
ISBN 978-0807044780

The author uses the ‘progress’ of white bread production to investigate inequalities across the US, from social stigma to race and gender. As white bread becomes more and more extruded, ending up with little to no nutritional value, ‘rustic’ or cottage industry loaves have become increasingly more fashionable. But even this throws up stark divisions in society, between those who can afford an expensive loaf and those whose budget only stretches to the basic white bread from supermarkets. EB

**Enough Is Enough: Building a Sustainable Economy in a World of Finite Resources**

Rob Dietz, Dan O’Neill | Earthscan | 2012  
ISBN 978-0415820936

As the arguments increasingly stack up in favour of a ‘steady state’ economy, this book looks at the reasons why limiting growth may be the answer to protecting our environment and reframing the economy. Rob Dietz and Dan O’Neil present a persuasive and engaging argument for creating a sustainable economy in a world of finite resources. Accessible, pragmatic and entirely lucid, this is a must-read for academics and lay-people alike. EB

**Why Animals Matter: Animal consciousness, animal welfare, and human well-being**

Marian Stamp Dawkins | 2012 | Oxford University Press  
ISBN 978-0199587827

An important and compelling book that makes a vivid case for reframing animal welfare. Rather than focusing on how we think animals feel (which are not always backed up with firm evidence), Stamp Dawkins argues that we should examine animal welfare from the perspective of what they do for us. Climate change, food insecurity and a growing global population all make these issues ever more urgent, and a clear understanding of the vital role animals play in our human health and wellbeing is crucial in tackling both animal welfare and the wider problems facing our food system. EB

**Bankrupting Nature**

Anders Wijkman, Johan Rockström | 2013 | Earthscan  
ISBN 978-

Building on the visionary work of Herman Daly, Tim Jackson and a few others, this book explores the wide-ranging implications of taking seriously ‘the limits to growth’. The authors pull no punches in identifying the scale of the challenges, and the desperate inadequacy of the response, individual and collective, of governments. Yet their most remarkable achievement is to nevertheless propose a series of measured, practical, but cumulatively transformative and inspiring policy prescriptions for a sustainable future. SR

**Food, Farms, and Solidarity: French Farmers Challenge Industrial Agriculture and Genetically Modified Crops**

Chaia Heller | Duke University Press Books | 2013  
ISBN 978-0822351184

What can we learn from the way that French farmers organised and communicated in their efforts to ban GM crops in their country? Chaia Heller explains that in France, rather than consumer-led opposition to GM food, the country’s largest agricultural union spearheaded the ‘Non’ campaign. She argues that focusing on farmer solidarity has allowed French food producers to concentrate on the cultural value of the food they grow, and so forge links with other groups in society. She posits that this approach could be effective in promoting ecological and social justice across the world. EB

# Forthcoming events

- 18th Mar - 20th Mar '13 Integrated climate action | European Climate Change adaptation conference  
<http://eccacnf.eu/index.php/page/Start-2012-04-04> | Hamburg, Germany
- 19th Mar '13 Healthy eating in a time of austerity | The 2nd Children's Food Conference  
Children's Food Trust | <http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/advice/conference>  
London, UK
- 22nd Mar '13 World Water Day | United Nations  
<http://www.unwater.org/watercooperation2013/>
- 3rd Apr - 5th Apr '13 Engaging Sociology: Annual conference of the British Sociological Association  
BSA | <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/events/bsa-annual-conference.aspx>  
London, UK
- 16th Apr - 17th Apr '13 Annual conference of the British society of animal science | BSAS  
<http://www.bsas.org.uk/> | Nottingham, UK
- 16th Apr - 17th Apr '13 Fruits and roots: a celebration and a look forward  
Association of applied biologists | <http://www.aab.org.uk/> | East Malling, UK
- 27th Apr '13 Food and uncertainty: the past, present and future of food security  
The 2nd annual Oxford Global Food Security Conference  
<http://www.futureoffood.ox.ac.uk/news/call-abstracts-oxford-global-food-security-conference> | Oxford, UK
- 29th April -30th April '13 3rd International Conference on Ecological, Environmental and Biological  
Sciences | Planetary Scientific Research Centre  
<http://psrcentre.org/listing.php?subcid=207&mode=detail> | Singapore
- 13th May - 15th May '13 Forests for food security and nutrition | FAO  
<http://www.fao.org/forestry/food-security/en/> | Rome, Italy
- 16th May '13 A diet for sustainability: Eat, drink and be ready  
Association of applied biologists | <http://www.aab.org.uk/> | Harpenden, UK
- 22nd May - 23rd May '13 Forestry, Biomass & Sustainability 2013 | Environmental Finance  
<http://www.environmental-finance.com/events/view/65> | London, UK
- 23rd May - 24th May '13 Large-scale intensive livestock production | BSAS  
<http://www.bsas.org.uk/events-conferences/> | Nottingham, UK
- 23rd Jun - 26th Jun '13 Greenhouse gases and animal agriculture conference  
University College Dublin | <http://www.ggaa2013.ie/> | Dublin, Ireland
- 15th July - 16th July '13 International conference on climate change and global warming | WASET  
<https://www.waset.org/conferences/2013/stockholm/iccgw/index.php>  
Stockholm, Sweden
- 18th - 23rd Aug '13 Ecology: Into the next 100 years | INTECOL | <http://www.intecol2013.org/>  
London, UK
- 29th Sept - 2nd Oct '13 First International Conference on Global Food Security | Elsevier  
<http://www.european-agronomy.org/frontpage/esa-events/item/first-international-conference-on-global-food-security.html>  
Noordwijkerhout, Netherlands
- 16th Oct '13 World Food Day | United Nations  
<http://www.fao.org/getinvolved/worldfoodday/en/>



*The Food Ethics Council works towards a food system that is fair and healthy for people and the environment.*

*Our independent research, and advice to business, government and civil society helps find a way through controversial issues and supports better choices in food and farming.*

*To keep up to date with our work, register at [www.foodethicscouncil.org](http://www.foodethicscouncil.org) to receive our free monthly e-newsletter.*