

February 2004

Top-up shopping boosts food retail

Date: Mon, 02 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Research undertaken by the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) indicates that a large majority of shoppers use top-trips to supplement their main weekly shop.

Over 90 per cent of respondents in an IGD survey stated that they take regular top-up shopping trips, 48 per cent of whom do so to replace items they have run out of and 37 per cent buying products they prefer to but more than once a week, such as fresh foods.

In addition, 22 per cent use top-up shopping to buy something that they have forgotten in their main shop, and 10 per cent because they need a specific item.

"We are seeing a surge in the trend of top-up shopping and it is not just down to time pressure," commented Joanne Denney-Finch, IGD chief executive. "Families are eating different foods at different times and there is an increased trend towards snacking.

"Shoppers want convenience, however they want to be able to park and have a wide range of products as well as being able to find the product they need in the least amount of time and effort."

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Ice cream manufacturers in acquisition deal

Date: Mon, 02 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Wigan-based ice cream-maker De Roma has avoided administration after being bought by a Yorkshire-based rival in a £3.4 million deal.

De Roma is one of the UK's largest ice cream manufacturers and suppliers, making own-label multi-pack ice cream for national supermarkets, now owned Richmond.

The company was established more than 80 years ago and employed just over 200 staff, but was forced to cut 55 jobs in December following trading difficulties.

In the year ending October 31 2002, De Roma recorded sales of £20.7 million, a gross profit of £4.1 million and an operating loss of £500,000.

Reports state that the fixed assets and stock being acquired by Richmond had a book value of £9.6 million and the outstanding finance lease obligations were approximately £500,000.

James Lambert, chief executive of Richmond, told Manchester Online: "I am delighted at the opportunity to acquire the De Roma business which will help move Richmond forward towards achieving our strategic goal of being the number one supplier of ice cream in the UK."

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NFU requests 'fair price' for poultry producers

Date: Mon, 02 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The National Farmers Union (NFU) is making calls for the establishment of fair prices for poultry producers, as well as a new partnership operating throughout the supply chain.

The union argues that rises in the cost of feed should be reflected in the prices paid to growers, in order to sufficiently safeguard the supply of quality chicken to the public.

NFU President Sir Ben Gill commented: "The NFU is committed to building supply chain relations to ensure greater understanding of the needs of the market.

"In return, the market beyond the farm gate needs to build greater awareness of the challenges that face farmers. Such an approach would improve efficiencies, as well as making the supply chain more transparent."

Sir Ben highlights the Assured Chicken Production Scheme as evidence of farmers' willingness to take consumer needs into consideration. The scheme currently accounts for over 80 per cent of all poultry production in the UK.

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Atkins diet impacts upon potato industry

Date: Mon, 02 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

New figures reveal that the growing popularity of the controversial Atkins diet may be having an adverse affect upon the UK's potato farming industry.

According to Albert Bartlett, the nation's largest vegetable grower, potato sales have fallen significantly since the widespread uptake of the Atkins diet, as consumers increasingly turn away from carbohydrate products.

The company reports a 10 per cent drop in sales over last summer, accountable to the Atkins craze. As a result, efforts are now being made by industry stakeholders to promote potatoes.

"The potato is seen as old-fashioned by a lot of people and we have to try and make the product more appealing to the younger generations," Bartlett's managing director, Ronnie Bartlett told the Scotsman.

"January is the time a lot of people start diets and that has definitely had an effect on us."

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GM farming aids medicine

Date: Mon, 02 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

It has been confirmed that GM crops designed to produce medical drugs are to be grown commercially for the first time since the technology was developed.

Officials at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have expressed concern over the potential health risks posed by second generation GM crops, following reports that a US biotech firm plans to cultivate modified rice that can treat diarrhoea.

The company plans to plant 130 acres of rice with the potential to generate enough lactoferrin to treat at least 650,000 sick children, and sufficient lysozyme for 6.5 million patients.

According to the Independent the company says that its plants "will become 'factories' that manufacture therapeutic proteins to combat life-threatening illnesses," including cancer, HIV, heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, kidney disease and Crohn's disease, cystic fibrosis among others.

The UK government has expressed cautious support of these "pharming" practices, but widespread uptake has not been considered.

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AGA announces board changes

Date: Mon, 02 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

AGA Foodservice has announced a number of board changes effective as of the beginning of February.

Peter Tom, present chief executive of Aggregate Industries plc has been appointed as an independent non-executive director.

Vic Cocker has replaced Kit Farrow, previous non-executive chairman at AGA. Mr Farrow has held the position at AGA for four years. As new chairman Vic Cocker will chair the Nomination Committee.

The Audit Committee will be chaired by John Lovering and comprise the three independent non-executive directors; John Lovering, Helen Mahy and Peter Tom. Peter Tom will chair the Remuneration Committee.

"I am delighted to welcome Peter to the Board of the Aga Foodservice Group. We have a strong non-executive team to which Peter's international business experience will add appreciably," said Mr Cocker.

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Londis asked to consider merger

Date: Tue, 03 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Londis members are being urged to consider a merger with fellow operator Nisa-Today's, in a proposal that has been made in lieu of an outright offer for purchase.

Nisa-Today's said a merger would benefit Londis shareholders, as it would boost buying power at the same time as retaining independent mutual status. Londis is presently a retail co-operative owned by its retail members.

The struggle for control of Londis began late last year with an offer from Budgens owner Musgrave, a deal that later lapsed following the emergence of news that four directors stood to share £20 million of the proceeds.

Dudley Ramsden, founder and chairman of Nisa-Today's, today outlined his offer in a letter to Londis shopkeepers:

"We have the potential to create an enlarged organisation with over £2 billion worth of retail sales, proudly distributing to over five thousand independent stores," he said according to the Scotsman.

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Obesity white paper this summer

Date: Tue, 03 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The government is to announce plans to publish a white paper this summer dealing with issues relating to the growing obesity epidemic affecting the UK population, particularly children.

Issues including advertising and food labelling will be addressed in the paper, in a bid to regulate the food industry's production, promotion and distribution of unhealthy foods.

However, it has been stressed that measures will be taken to avoid accusations of social engineering or nanny state intrusion, the government seeking to provide guidelines rather than rulings regarding health issues.

According to the Guardian the white paper will also address a range of other health issues including the possibility of locally imposed bans on smoking in public places and the rise in alcoholism.

Consultation for the paper is to last three months, involving parents and children coping with unhealthy diets.

The official announcement of the paper is to be made today by health secretary John Reid. Mr Reid is to accept that many previously discussed options are to be considered, but will rule out others such as barring the obese from access to health service.

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Dimaco to unveil label identification system

Date: Tue, 03 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Dimaco, a UK-based testing and inspection systems provider, has announced plans to unveil a new pack label identification, placement and verification unit to be used in mass food production.

The system, dubbed Veri-Pack, is designed to check labels on food packs and sleeves and can operate at speeds of up to 200 labels per minute.

According to Dimaco this makes it perfect for the producers of fast moving consumer goods in the food and drink industry.

Additionally, Veri-Pack is able to prevent the despatch of incorrectly labelled products going to market, thus preventing product recall. It is also compatible with a range of applications, operating with labels generated from thermal transfer, laser or inkjet printing.

Dimaco will also launch the new Veri-OCR, which can be integrated with the Veri-Pack system, designed to verify the code on the container or the label against a font stored in the system's memory.

"The Veri-OCR is a multi-orientation character recognition system and is ideal for those wanting to avoid costly product liability claims and high levels of returns due to incomplete and unreadable codes," Dimaco's CEO Ahmad Faruq told Food Production Daily.

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NFU comments on dairy sector CAP reforms

Date: Tue, 03 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The National Farmers Union has voiced approval of a new report on Common Agricultural Programme (CAP) reforms for the dairy sector.

The union asserts that the report, 'The Future of UK Dairy Farming', provides important indications of the likely impact of the CAP in the dairy industry, highlighting the need to invest in and develop the sector.

The report also argues that allocating dairy direct payments on an area rather than historic basis would penalise the most efficient and competitive dairy farmers.

"It sends out a clear message to government that payments need to be paid on an historic basis if we are to promote the further development of an efficient and, more importantly,

profitable dairy sector in Britain," NFU Milk chairman Terrig Morgan said. "It is clear that restructuring will result under a reformed CAP.

"Government must, therefore, ensure decoupling offers the necessary opportunities for farmers to adapt to the new climate or to make the transition into other areas of agriculture.
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Health officials criticise fast food promotion

Date: Tue, 03 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A number of health experts are criticising advertisers who use high-profile sports personalities to promote fast food.

Officials argue that because fast food is unhealthy such advertising is misleading, continuing to suggest that advertisers should do more to emphasise the complex diets professional athletes need to follow.

Recent promotions highlighted include a McDonald's advertisement featuring England rugby captain Lawrence Dallaglio.

"The issue here is about marketing towards children, because the promoting of unhealthy products is very intense," Martin Raymond of NHS Health Scotland told the Scotsman.

"We are not all about demonising types of food, but sometimes these products are marketed with some dishonesty."

Last year, the Food Standards Agency warned that television advertising was encouraging unhealthy eating in children and had likely links to obesity.

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Low-carb bread for Atkins followers

Date: Tue, 03 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A bakery claims to have developed a low carbohydrate formula that will allow Atkins Diet followers to eat bread without breaking the rules.

The low-carb loaf is the first of its kind in the UK, boasting 25 per cent carbohydrate content per slice than regular brands.

In the new bread wheat starch is replaced by fibre and wheat proteins, dramatically reducing overall carbohydrate levels.

The product has been developed by Nimble, who claim that Atkins followers could allow themselves two slices of the bread each day, in accordance with the recommended carbohydrate intake levels of the Atkins regime.

This development marks the extension of an increasingly popular low-carb trend, as more food producers develop products catering to Atkins needs. Heinz is set to launch a line of low-carb ketchup in the UK in the near future, having already seen success with the product in the US.

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Diversification earns £100 million

Date: Wed, 04 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Industry reports state that farm diversification added somewhere in the region of £100 million to English farm incomes last year.

A Defra report indicate that 56 per cent of the 60,400 farms in England earned money from businesses other than core farming in over 2002 and 2003.

Average income generated from all sources has risen to 23,900 from 20,300 in 2001/02, with gross UK farming income having risen 32 per cent last year to £3.2 billion.

UK food and farming minister Lord Whitty commented on the benefits of this growth and the need to maintain competition in the industry:

"We need competitive farmers and food producers," he told the Western Mail.

"Government investment will continue to help them to improve performance, and we are working together to lay foundations for a sustainable and profitable future for the rural economy."

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United Biscuits appoints new chairman

Date: Wed, 04 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Snack foods producer United Biscuits has appointed David Fish as its new non-executive chairman.

The appointment follows the company's decision to split the roles of chairman and chief executive. According to the Financial Times splitting the roles of chairman and chief executive will allow CEO Malcolm Ritchie to focus more on daily operational duties.

Mr Fish held a number of senior management positions at Mars between 1974 and 2001, including president at Snackfoods Europe and joint president, Masterfoods Europe.

He is currently a non-executive director of Royal Mail Holdings, Tate and Lyle and Christian Salvesen.

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GM ingredients found in soya products

Date: Wed, 04 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A study has revealed that almost 40 per cent of soya food from British health food shops contains genetically modified ingredients.

The study, carried out by researchers from the University of Glamorgan of health food shops in South Wales and Yorkshire over last summer, used an EU-approved method to detect any GM proteins.

Ten out of 25 samples of food products containing soya tested GM positive, and 80 per cent of these were labelled either "GM free" or "organic", both of which imply an absence of GM ingredients in these foods.

"Most of the soya now produced in the world comes from GM varieties," Professor Denis Murphy, head of the unit, told News Wales. "It was therefore of interest to the Unit to determine whether the supposedly "GM free" soya products, available in the UK, really contained no GM ingredients.

"Given that GM soya production is set to increase even more over the coming years, it is difficult to see how 'GM free' labels can be justified unless there is much more rigorous testing of such foods," added Professor Murphy.

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Defra gains new science advisory council

Date: Wed, 04 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Government ministers have appointed a new body to give expert and independent advice on science policy and strategy to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The council is made up of 12 members, existing to help guide Defra's scientific priorities and work.

It will be chaired by Professor Roy Anderson FRS, Head of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at Imperial College, London. Sir John Marsh CBE, Governor of the Scottish Crop Research Institute and the Royal Agricultural College, and President of the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants, will be Vice-Chair.

Its first meeting is likely to take place in either March or April, and much of the work of the council will be carried out through sub-groups.

Figures indicate that Defra spends more than £300million a year on science and research underpinning a broad range of policies including environmental protection, farming and food, animal and plant health, and sustainable energy.

"The SAC will be an important source of cross-cutting advice to me, helping Defra to anticipate and prepare for new risks and opportunities so that future policies and strategies

are even better informed by sound science," Howard Dalton, Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser, Public Technology.Net.

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School gets healthy with snack options

Date: Wed, 04 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A secondary school in Bedfordshire has become the first in the UK to replace junk foods in vending machines with healthier alternatives.

Pupils now have the choice of organic and natural drinks and snacks from a number of Green Machine units installed this week.

Available snacks include additive-free Fruesli bars, organic orange juice and mineral water.

Staff believe that healthier eating habits during break and meal times will lead to improved concentration levels in the classroom and potentially better behaviour all-round, in addition to the obvious health benefits.

"We took the ethical decision that is facing thousands of schools across the UK," said Queensbury's head teacher, Nigel Hill. "Do you put students' health first or the money you can make from selling them chocolate and fizzy drinks?"

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Farming co-operative anticipates technical growth

Date: Wed, 04 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Welsh Meat Company, Wales leading farmer's co-operative has appointed a new acting general manager to lead them through an upcoming period of technical development.

Members are confident that David Nicholson will provide vital industry experience in his new position, helping the Co-operative to develop in the future. Mr Nicholson, formerly the managing director of Oriel Jones & Son, replaces Jane James, the new director of the Prince's Trust in Wales.

"Since its launch more than two years ago, the Celtic Pride brand has come a very long way and is now recognised as one of Wales' leading examples of how collaboration can result in quality products which are competitive in the current market place," Welsh Meat Company marketing manager Nicola Raymond-Evans told the Western Mail.

"As the brand continues to grow, The Welsh Meat Company needs to put in place the technical infrastructure necessary for that success to continue," she added.

"With his technological background and expertise, Mr Nicholson has the experience needed to ensure the Celtic Pride brand continues to develop and provide new, quality markets for the Welsh farming industry well into the future."

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Thorntons acquisition deal collapses

Date: Thu, 05 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Chocolate retailer Thorntons has reported a 10 per cent drop in shares after talks for a possible buyout came to a close.

It is thought that Thorntons attracted bid as high as £120 million, but chairman John Thornton has not confirmed the origin or value of the offers.

"It never really reached the stage of final offers, it was still at the indicative offer stage," he told The Belfast News

"The management are highly committed to the business. They didn't go out to seek this - it came to them. Now we just want to get on with being a plc."

Thorntons owns 388 stores, but also sells through franchises in greeting cards shops. It also supplies own-brand products to high street retailers Marks & Spencer and Boots.

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Alcohol flavour biscuits raise concerns

Date: Thu, 05 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

An Australian baker has attracted criticism for producing a new line of alcohol flavoured biscuits, accused of attempting to draw young people into drinking culture.

The biscuits are relatively low in alcohol content, with reports stating that an average sized man would need to consume 40 kg worth in one sitting before registering a blood alcohol reading on the Australian drink-drive limit.

However, Green MP Sue Kedgley says Arnott's bakery should stop distributing its Kahlua-flavoured Mint Slices and Tia Maria-tinged Tim Tams.

"Introducing booze-flavoured chocolate biscuits is going far too far," she commented.

"Marketers are targeting children and young people at ever-younger ages in an attempt to get them hooked on the taste of alcohol."

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Food and drink producers urged to go green

Date: Thu, 05 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Businesses in the food and drink sector are being encouraged to adopt environmentally friendly practices in order to improve operations and boost profits.

Envirowise, a Government programme providing free practical advice on resource efficiency, has hosted a seminar aimed at local companies in the food and drink sector, with leading business people from that sector sharing their personal experiences of their companies embracing resource efficiency.

The UK food and drink industry has a market value in excess of £90 billion and generates nine per cent of national manufacturing output, the UK's largest industrial sector in terms of turnover.

According to Envirowise, companies can save up to 50 per cent in water and waste-water costs through low and no-cost changes to their work practices.

"All businesses can cut costs and increase savings through the efficient use of resources, and food and drink businesses are no exception," Dr Stuart Ballinger of Envirowise told the Peterborough Evening Telegraph.

"As businesses look towards the next big thing, and the next big profit, sustainable business practices must, and will, become inherent in the way we work and produce."

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Calls for improved food labelling

Date: Thu, 05 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

European food and drink industry officials are urging producers to improve labelling on all products, claiming that much existing labelling is misleading.

Reports state that the head of the new European Food Safety Authority is calling for a ban on claims that foods high in salt, sugar and fat are healthy. According to Geoffrey Podger enriching such foods with vitamins is not enough to justify these claims.

New regulations on labelling that will draw on scientific advice from Mr Podger's authority are currently being planned. "We should recognise there are foods that are naughty but nice," he told the BBC.

"No harm in eating them, but to start making health claims because you have added ingredients to them will just confuse the situation, and make it more difficult for all of us to balance our diets."

Which? Magazine supports these views, arguing that current food labelling is often too confusing for most consumers to fully understand. "We'd like to see one clear labelling system for additives to make it easier to avoid additives and to compare what's in different foods," it asserts.

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Government backs pork pie protection

Date: Thu, 05 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The government has announced its support of a new campaign to give the Melton Mowbray pork pie the same protected status as such food products as Parma ham and Stilton cheese.

Traditionally produced in the Melton Mowbray area of Leicestershire, the pie is distinctive due to its dumpy appearance and specific, uncured pork.

Lord Whitty, Food Minister, has pledged support for the attempt to win European Union recognition for the culinary speciality.

Over 10,000 supporters have added their names to a petition supporting the campaign, including celebrity chef Jamie Oliver.

If the pie is granted protected status, producers could potentially benefit from increased demand and the ability to market Melton Mowbray pies as exclusive and unique.

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Livestock to produce "healthier" fats with new worm gene

Date: Thu, 05 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Experts have found that livestock can be genetically manipulated to produce the kind of "healthy" fats found naturally in types of oily fish.

Tests carried out by scientists at Harvard University discovered that a specific kind of worm gene was able to convert one type of fatty acid into another recommended by diet experts.

The Omega-3 fatty acids have been described as a useful "super-food", with alleged benefits to the heart and brain development in children.

If applied to livestock including cows and sheep, the gene could result in the production of milk and meat rich in healthy natural oils.

"Production of n-3 fatty acids by the animals themselves would be a cost effective and sustainable way of meeting the increasing demand," Dr Jing Kang, head of the Harvard team, told the BBC.

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Food and drink employers facing workforce shortage

Date: Fri, 06 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Industry reports reveal that almost half of all employers in the UK food and drink industry are facing shortages in workforce skills.

The National Employers Skills Survey 2003 report by the Learning and Skills Council has been published this week, indicating that 46 per cent of employers are facing these problems.

"The report makes uncomfortable reading for anyone involved in the food and drink industry," Paul Wilkinson, chairman of Improve, stated.

"It is crystal clear that one of the first things we need to do is address the skills gap that is currently blighting the industry," he added according to Aroq.

It has been argued that investment in training is only part of the solution, and Improve has suggested career development schemes as a more strategic approach to tackling the problem.

Improve is currently bidding to become the Food and Drink Sector Skills Council and is adamant that the industry should back the new organisation to share best practice and address the issue.

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Ireland FSA appoints new FSA

Date: Fri, 06 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) today announced the appointment of Dr John O'Brien as its new chief executive.

Dr O'Brien is currently Director of Corporate Scientific Affairs at Danone and head of the Danone Food Safety Centre based in Paris.

His previous posts included lecturer in food chemistry at UCC, and lecturer in food safety and toxicology at the University of Surrey.

"Dr O'Brien brings a unique wealth of food safety knowledge, combined with senior management and organisational experience in an international context," commented Daniel O'Hare, chairman of the FSAI, told Breaking News.

"He will add immensely to our collective experience and will lead our food safety team with a common purpose of protecting consumer health in relation to food."

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UK obesity levels on the rise

Date: Fri, 06 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new study has revealed that obesity levels in the UK have tripled since 1987, with an increasing number of adults classified as overweight.

Figures indicate that 25 per cent of all men and 20 per cent of all women are officially obese. Additionally, 41 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women are overweight.

The figures, from the 2001 national diet and nutrition survey, show a substantial rise in obesity rates since it was last conducted in 1987, when eight percent of women and 12 per cent of men were considered obese.

The survey also showed that many people have a lack of awareness about health and exercise levels.

Experts suggest that the growing levels are largely down to weight problems among younger people, with many children forming unhealthy eating habits.

Treating obesity and its effects costs the National Health Service more than £500 million a year. The government recently outlined plans to publish a white paper on UK obesity, due for release later this year.

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Londis shareholders approach merger with caution

Date: Fri, 06 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A proposed merger between Londis and Nisa-Today has received an indifferent response from Londis' shareholders.

Reports state that Iceland owner, the Big Food Group (BFG), also expressed interest in Londis after Irish retail group Musgrave announced a bid in December 2003.

A merger deal with Nisa-Today would see Londis' value sit somewhere in the region of £29 million, over £11 million less than the £40 million estimated to result from a takeover by Musgrave or BFG.

Commentators argue that Nisa stands to benefit more from the merger than Londis would.

Nisa chairman Dudley Ramsden has made a direct approach to Londis shareholders similar to that made by BFG's Bill Grimsey back in December.

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Food quality survey welcomed by NFU Scotland

Date: Fri, 06 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Scottish arm of the National Farmers Union has welcomed a new survey of consumer attitudes to food and farming.

The survey, published today addresses the importance of Scottish produce to consumers, highlighting the origin of food and method of production as significant factors influencing buying decisions.

"This survey has sent a clear message to the industry that the quality of our production is recognised and supported by Scottish consumers," NFUS President John Kinnaird said.

"Maintaining and building on that support is crucial to the future of our members' businesses," he added.

The survey showed that a large proportion of consumers are in favour of promoting domestically produced goods, with 61 per cent of consumers wanting to source Scottish meat and 80 per cent aware of the farm assured Scotch label.

"This survey has confirmed that the public recognise the importance of farming to Scotland as a whole," concluded Mr Kinnaird.

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Bottling and packaging to employ IT

Date: Mon, 09 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Food and drink manufacturers are facing increasing pressure to conform to legislation calling for detailed records of supply chains to be kept.

As a result, industry members will need to adopt IT measures in the packaging and bottling process, in order to keep abreast of traceability requirements.

IT group Syskron, a subsidiary of the Krones group, has developed a range of software products for this purpose, designed to enable a production line to run as efficiently as possible.

In addition to traceability, the software gives manufacturers the opportunity to identify means of increasing efficiency resulting in cost savings, allowing users to obtain the data necessary for optimising production processes.

According to Syskron the software can determine almost immediately where the biggest energy consumption within a production line is located.

For maintenance and servicing work Syskron has developed the Syskron Intelligent Plant Maintenance System (SIPS), designed to enable the life-cycle costs of bottling and packaging machinery to be reduced.

These innovations will allow European producers to comply with Directive 178/2002 of the European Parliament that defines a comprehensive safety system covering the entire production chain.

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Smithfield completes UK acquisitions

Date: Mon, 09 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

US meat processor Smithfield Foods today announced the completed acquisitions of two UK-based meat companies, the Norwich Food Company Ltd. and Ridpath Pek.

The two companies have been combined to form Smithfield Foods Ltd. Terms of the transaction are as yet undisclosed, but the new company is expected to generate revenues upwards of \$65 million (£35 million), according to JustFood.com.

Smithfield Foods Ltd. will provide fresh meats to retailers nationwide, as well as develop a range of processed, chilled and canned meat products specifically for the UK market.

"Norwich and Ridpath Pek are nearly perfectly complementary to each other, with virtually no overlap in products or customers, which creates attractive opportunities for providing our customers with a full range of high quality meat products," said Robert A. Sharpe II, president, international operations.

Smithfield will be led by John Alton Jones, chief executive officer, previous co-managing director of Norwich Foods.

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FSA promotes healthy vending machines in schools

Date: Mon, 09 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Food Standards Agency is taking active measures to replace vending machines in Scottish schools with new ones offering a healthier range of snacks.

Researchers working for the FSA have tested vending machines that only sell water, milk and fruit juices as part of the campaign against rising levels of obesity among children. Last week, a Scottish secondary school became the first in the UK to provide health food vending machines, offering fruit bars and water.

According to tests healthy snacks prove popular among schoolchildren if available. However, concerns have been raised that revenue from snack sales may fall significantly if crisps, sweets and fizzy drinks are removed from schools altogether.

"There was a fear that the new products would be ignored, but that just didn't happen," Joe Harvey, director of the Health Education Trust, which carried out the research, told the Scotsman.

"If we got the location and servicing of the machine and the products right then it proved to be very successful," he added.

It is now hoped that the initiative will be adopted nationwide, with a view to improving the eating habits of UK schoolchildren in the long-term.

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Slave labour rise blamed on retailers

Date: Mon, 09 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A number of popular UK retailers are being highlighted as responsible for growing labour problems in many parts of the world, according to a new report from Oxfam.

The charity group maintains that big-brand food and clothing firms are pressurizing suppliers to deliver products faster and cheaper, using market dominance to squeeze operating costs.

According to Oxfam this results in significantly decreased wages and the compromising of the welfare of ground-level workers.

"There is a widening gap between the rhetoric of global corporate social responsibility and the reality of corporate practice," Oxfam's policy director, Justin Forsyth told the Guardian.

Tesco and Asda-Wal-Mart, British retailers identified in the report, deny allegations of malpractice. Wal-Mart states that they operate under a strict ethical code and Tesco has commented that the Oxfam report was inaccurate and out of date.

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Watchdog calls for improved nutritional labelling

Date: Mon, 09 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Consumers' Association (CA) has voiced criticisms of both the government and food industry for not prioritising nutritional information on food labelling.

The group warns that current attitudes concerning nutritional information are inadequate, arguing that obesity levels will continue to grow unless more effective measures are taken to address the problem.

CA officials also state that the Food Standard Agency should take the lead in approaching the issue.

EU legislation is in on its way but the government cannot afford to rest on its laurels," said principal policy advisor Sue Davies, according to Food Production Daily. "With half of women and two thirds of men in the UK overweight or obese it is time to take tough action to force the food industry to stop the healthy choice being the hard choice."

The announcements come as the food industry is being urged to take greater responsibility for health issues, with increasing emphasis being placed on labelling.

Defending the UK's food industry, the Food and Drink Federation commented: "Additive labelling is governed by the EU Labelling Directive; however UK manufacturers are always looking at the best way to provide product information within these constraints."

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Tesco labels to provide carb info

Date: Mon, 09 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Tesco has announced that labels for its own brand products are to carry specific information pertaining to carbohydrate content.

Labels will feature a 'glycemic index', ranking carbohydrates according to their levels on blood glucose levels, according to Aroq.

The initiative is intended to aid those following low-carbohydrate diets, in light of the growing popularity of the Atkins regime.

The supermarket also asserts that the data will be useful to athletes who need to restore blood-sugar levels after exercise and diabetics who also need to be aware of blood sugar levels.

Tesco is reportedly in talks with Olympic rower Sir Steve Redgrave about appearing in an advertising campaign to back the new labels. Sir Redgrave is vice-president of the charity Diabetes UK.

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Iceland launches aphrodisiac pizza

Date: Tue, 10 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

National supermarket chain Iceland has announced plans to release a new pizza it claims has particular health benefits.

Developers of the 'Pizzagra' pizza assert that it will act as an effective aphrodisiac, featuring a number of ingredients and toppings renowned for their ability to lift libidos in both men and women.

Included in these are artichoke, asparagus, ginger, chocolate and banana.

An early prototype of the Pizzagra also has a special heart-shaped base, in keeping with the theme.

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Soy-enriched bread nears UK launch

Date: Tue, 10 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new type of bread said to lower cholesterol and improve heart health is approaching its UK launch.

The soy-enriched bread has been developed by UK bread maker Allied Bakeries, hoping to capitalise on the growing popularity of soya-based products among British consumers in recent years.

The UK bread industry is the second largest in the food sector, worth over £3 billion, but there have not been many 'functional' products introduced, unlike in other food sectors.

Industry figures indicate that fibre-enhanced bread continues to grow in popularity, as overall bread sales grew in the 1990s following decline over the previous decade.

Prior to that sales of wholemeal bread saw dramatic increases between 1975 and 1985 due to an increased awareness of the benefits of fibre in the diet and the availability of lighter wholemeal bread, according to Food and Drink Europe.

Allied new bread contains a patented soy composition called Abacor made by Norwegian firm Nutri Pharma, blending ingredients found to reduce cholesterol including soy protein, fibre and phospholipids.

The new bread is one of three new products under Allied's Burgen range set to launch in the UK over the next few weeks. In Australia, the Burgen brand includes a rye variety for digestive balance, Burgen Soy-Lin for women's wellbeing and an oatbran and honey variety for heart health.

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Oats cleared of toxin traces

Date: Tue, 10 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new survey has revealed that UK oat products contain virtually no traces of harmful toxins, following earlier reports that retail oat goods were susceptible to contamination.

Out of 335 samples of a wide range of retail oat products selected at random, 48 per cent contained no mycotoxins at all, and the remainder showed significantly low levels. These products included Jordan's, Heinz, and Cow & Gate.

There are currently no regulatory oat toxin limits in the UK, but maximum limits are under discussion in the EU. The vast majority of the levels found in this survey are below the proposed EC limits.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) asserts that the toxin levels identified in the survey were well within the safety zone, but maintains that "they may pose long-term risks to people's health if they eat food that contains high levels," according to Food Navigator.

"The results of this survey indicate that human exposure to fusarium toxins is very low in the UK," it was added.

Fusarium toxins occur naturally in a particular type of mould that can grow on cereal crops. These mycotoxins are chemically stable and survive food processing, posing a potential risk to human health.

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EU agencies to cooperate on promoting healthy eating

Date: Tue, 10 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

European food agencies have agreed to work in cooperation for the promotion of dietary health in EU member states.

The initiative is intended to tackle such growing problems as high salt levels in processed foods, increased junk food consumption and growing obesity levels evidenced in many European countries.

They have also agreed that obesity is a major threat to public health across member states and that strong action is needed to reverse the trend.

They will also address how increased sale of processed foods and food eaten outside the home has led to an increase in salt in the diet, generally significantly higher than recommended levels.

The announcement comes in light of growing concerns over food issues in Europe, including the production and distribution of GM goods and nutritional information on food packaging as well as those issues outline above.

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Scottish fish farms under threat

Date: Tue, 10 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A number of small fish farms in Scotland could be in danger of closure as a result of falling fish prices, according to new reports.

A recent US study suggesting that farmed salmon contains high levels of unnatural toxins could be of further detriment, impacting upon demand and future sales.

Two farms, Orkney Sea Farms Ltd and Mainstream, attribute recent job cuts to the effects of the study.

Tony Mackay, an economist working with Inverness-based Mackay Consultants, said the basic problem had been a fall in the price of farmed salmon, with figures dropping from over £4 a kilogram in 1993 to below £2/kg since summer 2001.

"The main reason for the fall has been the large increase in the production of farmed salmon, not just in Scotland but also in other countries such as Norway and Chile," Mr Mackay told the Scotsman.

"Although there has been a substantial increase in the consumption of farmed salmon, the price statistics indicate that the production increase has been greater," he added.

It has been argued, however, that salmon farms in the Shetlands are likely to be bought out of receivership, allowing them to continue operations.

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Would one like fries with that?

Date: Wed, 11 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

McDonalds is going upmarket with the launch of a new-look store in London's West End, according to the Evening Standard.

The new Strand branch of the popular fast-food chain has undergone a major restructuring, offering the same selection of burgers and fries in an all-new luxury setting.

The development is part of a continued effort on the part of many fast-food retailers to continue to attract customers, in the face of increasingly health conscious trends.

A new range of healthy options has been launched in some European McDonalds branches, and new UK advertising campaigns feature prominent sports personalities.

Featured in the new Strand restaurant are leather armchairs, retro-styled seating, glass panelling and chrome finishes combined with special lighting.

Plans to revamp other existing McDonalds stores are yet to be announced.

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Child obesity levels balloon

Date: Wed, 11 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Experts are warning that child obesity rates in the UK are ready to soar unless measures are taken to prevent the spread of the problem and reverse unhealthy dietary trends.

A new report from Britain's Faculty of Public Health, the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health raises alarming statistics pertaining to weight problems among the nations young, a problem that has been cause for increasing concern in recent years.

According to the report a third of British girls will be obese, in conjunction with a fifth of all boys and at least a third of all adults, if current trends continue.

This would have a severe impact upon national healthcare, likely to see a rise in such ailments as heart disease and diabetes.

"This report highlights the terrifying health consequences of the obesity epidemic that will particularly impact on our children," said Professor Peter Kopelman, who chaired the report.

Experts raise concerns that children do not undertake in adequate exercise at school, and also worry that socially deprived youngsters are more likely to fall prey to poor eating habits and undue weight gain.

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Saupiquet launches rectangular Peel Seam

Date: Wed, 11 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Saupiquet, reinforcing as an innovator in the processed fish industry, has announced the launch of an innovative new peelable lid for mackerel fillets.

The new 170-gram package runs on Saupiquet's existing canning and filling lines and is designed to increase the convenience of use for customers and ease of production for the manufacture, of the fish product.

"Mackerel consumers have long demanded the convenience of easy-open ends," said a spokesperson for Saupiquet.

"By implementing the new Peel Seam(TM) solution, we have been able to meet this important requirement while building brand differentiation and further increasing customer loyalty."

The innovative Saupiquet package has also been recognised by the European Aluminium Foil Association (EAFA) as one of four "Foil Packs of the Year 2003."

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Thai chicken removed from school menus amidst safety fears

Date: Wed, 11 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A number of schools in the UK have decided to remove cooked chicken products originating from Thailand in light of growing concerns over the bird flu epidemic.

Scolarest, the catering company which supplies school meals in Bedfordshire, emphasised this week that the chicken was not a health risk. However, it has voiced acknowledgment of the concerns of teachers, parents and pupils.

The company confirms that following the next half-term break, any chicken products which are usually supplied from Thailand will be substituted for meat products from other areas, until further notice.

An EU ban has been imposed upon importing raw chicken meat from Thailand, but it does not extend to include cooked meat.

"On no occasion would Scolarest put the health of our customers at risk and we always act swiftly in response to government advice and directives," stated Scolarest according to Luton Today.

"Moreover, we always listen to the concerns of our customers and as such have decided on the above interim course of action."

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Birds Eye Wall replace seagull with new £30 million logo

Date: Wed, 11 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Birds Eye Wall, the UK frozen food manufacturer and subsidiary of Unilever, has spent £30 million on updating its logo for the 21st century.

The familiar seagull logo, which has adorned Birds Eye products for over half a century, is to be replaced by a new logo which, as yet, remains shrouded in mystery, with only a select few having seen it.

According to reports in the Daily Telegraph, a Birds Eye spokesman was quoted as describing the new logo as "really something to ponder over".

"It is not intended to be definitive by shape or design so it is interesting to see how people respond to it," he continued.

The new logo is set to hit supermarket deep freezes from April onwards, with an official range, including fish, steaming vegetables and chicken products, to be launched in June.

The Birds Eye white seagull was first used by the company in 1938, and has endured up to the present day, despite attempts in 1998 to replace the ageing Cap'n Birds Eye character with a younger model, which engendered a luke-warm public response.

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Nutritional improvements could help prevent obesity

Date: Wed, 11 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

New research suggests that working to reduce hunger and malnourishment in unborn and young children could prevent obesity in later life.

A study released today by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) draws together a body of evidence indicating that hunger during pregnancy "programmes" foetal tissues to get the most out of the food energy available.

This is likely to lead to excess nourishment in adult life, when coupled with food availability and unhealthy lifestyles.

The report argues that developing nations in particular may suffer from these problems as unhealthy foods become more readily available in the future while many are born into hunger now.

As a result, experts are concerned that these countries will be faced with disproportionately high healthcare costs, as seen in many countries including the US and UK.

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Farmers welcome CAP reforms

Date: Thu, 12 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) has stated that the farmers are reacting positively to upcoming changes in the farming industry to result from this week's decision on Common Agricultural Policy reform.

The UFU argues that the industry is on the brink of fundamental change, whereby farmers will have the flexibility to make their own decisions, free of the current subsidy system.

There will also be a renewed emphasis on issues such as the environment, food quality and food safety.

"The reforms will bring farmers and the general public into a new era," UFU president, John Gilliland told Farming Life. "The CAP support given to farmers accounts for about three per cent of the public expenditure in Northern Ireland.

"In return, Northern Ireland farming families will be looking after the countryside and our environment, producing quality food and it will help keep farming families in rural communities. We think this is good value for money," he added.

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Chicken to fuel power plant in £10m plan

Date: Thu, 12 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Plans to establish a renewable power plant fuelled entirely by chicken waste are coming closer to being realised following approval from the Environment Agency.

This approval confirms that health and environmental issues, such as emissions, odour, noise and traffic, have been cleared as safe.

Banham Poultry, the Attleborough-based group behind the initiative is now seeking planning permission from Norfolk County Council, before development can begin.

The plant will use advanced energy production technology known as pyrolysis to convert chicken waste into combustible gas, thereafter providing a reliable source of electricity.

"By transforming animal by-products into clean, renewable energy, we believe this project is of strategic significance - not only for reducing waste and boosting renewable energy supplies, but also for the future competitiveness of our food and farming industries," company director, Robin Goram told EDP24.

"Norfolk has a stated ambition to be a leader in waste reduction, and a pioneering centre for alternative energy," he added.

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Toxins found in cereals and baby foods

Date: Thu, 12 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Research undertaken by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has found potentially harmful toxins in a number of breakfast cereals and some baby food products.

Traces of mycotoxins were found in 335 brand-name products in the study, including 50 per cent of cereals and muesli breakfast bars.

The FSA stresses that the risks posed by these findings are minimal, and of no threat as long as consumers maintain balanced and healthy diets.

However, out of 21 baby food products examined three had toxin levels in excess of European Union safety limits.

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UK consumers opting for functional food

Date: Thu, 12 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Industry reports reveal that an increasing proportion of consumers in the UK are turning to functional foods for health and dietary benefits.

Figures from Datamonitor indicate that over the past five years the number of functional food consumers in the UK has more than doubled and is forecast to grow to 4.7 million by 2007; an increase of almost 40 per cent.

Currently the UK and Germany spend the most on functional food in Europe, with Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden reporting the lowest expenditure.

Experts suggest that the reason consumers choose functional foods varies, many opting for functional products to tackle specific health problems such as high cholesterol, and some incorporating them into an overall healthier lifestyle.

The latest functional food product expected to see widespread popularity is Allied Bakeries' soy-enriched bread, said to have cholesterol-lowering qualities.

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Technology drives McDonald's innovation

Date: Thu, 12 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Branches of McDonald's restaurants in the UK are adopting new technologies in an attempt to attract customers to the leading fast food chain.

Many of the 1,230 UK McDonald's branches are introducing technology-borne services such as wireless networking, PlayStation 2 games consoles, Internet terminals, flat screen televisions and music videos, as part of a widespread revamp.

These initiatives are intended to allow customers to remain digitally connected while at McDonald's as well as make visits to the restaurants more entertaining.

"It's about offering customers more choice and making the restaurants more relevant," Steve Tiley, McDonald's head of management information systems told Computing.

"No one single thing will attract customers, but by offering healthier food options, new decor, entertainment and internet access, people will choose McDonald's over other restaurants," he added.

Another new scheme being piloted at McDonald's is the introduction of chip-and-PIN payment card readers, expected to significantly reduce queuing times and make the payment process more efficient for both customers and staff.

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Safeway bid backed by Shareholders

Date: Thu, 12 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Morrisons shareholders have confirmed approval of the proposed £3billion acquisition of Safeway, voting 99 per cent in favour of the move.

If successful, the merger will create the fourth largest supermarket chain in the UK, behind Tesco, Sainsbury's and WalMart-owned ASDA..

"This merger will be a transforming step for Morrisons, enabling us to take the distinct Morrisons formula and our passion and flair for food retailing to customers everywhere in the UK," commented Sir Ken Morrison, Morrisons chief executive

He went on to state that the result endorsed the group's strategy and underlined the benefits for customers, suppliers, employees and shareholders.

The deal will result in the group's ownership of a total of 552 stores, but job losses to the tune of some 1,200 are likely to be sustained.

Additionally, Morrisons has outlined plans to replace Safeway's head office in Hayes with an enlarged facility in Bradford.

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Experts prove benefits of Cod Liver Oil

Date: Fri, 13 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new clinical study of the regular intake of Cod Liver Oil has revealed that the famous yellow syrup may afford genuine medical benefits.

Traditionally, Cod Liver Oils has been accepted as a medical panacea, used to treat a range of ailments including infections, high cholesterol, allergies and even stress.

Now scientists have released data indicating that it actually can help slow the damage to joint cartilage caused by osteoarthritis in a study led by Professor Bruce Caterson and Professor John Harwood of Cardiff University, and Professor Colin Dent, orthopaedic consultant at the University of Wales College of Medicine.

Out of 31 patients tested, 86 per cent of those who took two daily capsules of Cod Liver Oil 10 to 12 weeks prior to total knee-joint replacement surgery had absent or significantly reduced levels of the enzymes that cause cartilage damage, compared with 26 per cent of those given the placebo capsules.

Patients resort to joint replacement surgery when the symptoms and pain of their arthritis becomes unbearable," Professor Dent told the Independent. "Cod liver oil can counteract these symptoms and if you can switch off the cartilage destruction and pain, then surgery may not be necessary."

Experts argue that the health benefits of cod liver oil stem from its high levels of vitamins A and D as well as useful fatty acids.

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Subway announces further UK expansion

Date: Fri, 13 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Fastfood sandwich chain Subway has announced plans to open new branches across the UK within the next six years.

By 2010 the group hopes to have opened 1,800 new outlets, according to AROQ, strengthening its UK position and consolidating its position as one of the world's leading sandwich retailers.

The group says that expansion plans reflected the "huge growth potential" of the sandwich franchise chain. It currently operates 200 outlets in the UK, having opened its first in 1996.

"The UK is seen as a gateway to Europe for Subway and the chain will use its experiences here as an example of best practices and how effectively and efficiently they can be carried out in international markets," said Kevin Graham, area development manager for Subway in the UK and Ireland.

"Although we represent just one per cent of Subway's overall worldwide store count of 20,000, that one per cent is a very significant number."

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Exhibition to showcase production innovations

Date: Fri, 13 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A number of innovative food manufacturing products are to feature at the 2004 Foodex Meatex exhibition, tipped to be the most successful yet.

New exhibitors include Wales-based Heathpak, specialising in packaging, due to showcase production solutions for tray erecting and filing. Ireland-based Food Design Applications will introduce a new multi-functional oven and a unique colour monitor that allows manufacturers to monitor the temperature and colour of cooking foods.

The monitor has been developed in conjunction with the Universities of Limerick and Cork, which both specialise in food science, and its developers believe it will mark a significant step forward in traceability and quality control.

It has also been reported that CSM Food Processing, recently formed by parent company Combustion Systems, will present new equipment designed to heat food quicker at Foodex.

"As the date of the show approaches, the sales office always gets increasingly busy but this is the busiest I've ever seen it at this time of year," Foodex sales and exhibitor relations manager Linda Moore told Food Production Daily.

"There has already been a great deal of interest in the various promotional options so exhibitors will need to be quick if they want to maximise their presence at Foodex Meatex," she added.

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Atkins alternative approved

Date: Fri, 13 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new on-line nutritional programme has tested favourably in comparison to other popular diets, including the controversial high-protein Atkins regime.

According to a trial undertaken by BBC Eve magazine the nutritional programme proposed by MyNutrition.co.uk is more effective for weight loss and healthy living than Weightwatchers, Slim-Fast, Montignac and Atkins.

MyNutrition offers specific health and diet regimes tailored to an individual's personal health profile.

"This is a much healthier approach to weight loss than excess protein diets, which may appear effective on the surface but have a range of dangerous side effects," argues Drew Fobbester, nutrition consultant and founder of MyNutrition.co.uk.

"Excess protein diets have the potential to destroy health and well-being - their effectiveness is an illusion," he adds.

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FSA challenges producers over 'fresh' labels

Date: Fri, 13 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Food Standards Agency is accusing the food industry of misleading customers with the use of terms such as "fresh" and "natural", following the results of a recent study.

According to the survey, 40 per cent of 220 samples were misleading or ambiguous despite the fact that the majority of manufacturers had acted in accordance of the FSA's best practice guidance.

In July 2002, the agency issued advice on the use of eight descriptive marketing terms: fresh; pure; natural; traditional; original; authentic; home made and farmhouse. Rosemary Hignett, head of Food Labelling and Standards at the FSA, explained the importance of using these terms appropriately to Food Production Daily:

"They [the consumer] rightly expect foods labelled with these terms to be different in some way from products that don't carry these types of descriptions.

"For instance, they don't expect items labelled fresh to have a four-week shelf life, they don't expect items labelled as pure to have added ingredients and they don't expect products with ingredients described as natural to have used artificial preservatives and additives," she added.

Food and Drink Federation deputy director general Martin Paterson explained that producers are not out to mislead, and that consumers are protected from false claims by the 1990 Food Safety Act.

"In a highly competitive market, manufacturers try and differentiate their products, many of which are based on traditional recipes and production methods," he added.

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UK child obesity clinic reaches capacity

Date: Fri, 13 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The UK's only NHS clinic exclusively tackling child obesity has reached capacity after only a few weeks in operation.

The Walsall-based healthy lifestyle clinic has filled all of its 35 places and now faces a waiting list of ten additional youngsters. It was originally intended for 11 to 17-year-olds but health chiefs have lowered the age limit to nine due to accommodate demand.

The majority of children visiting the clinic are between nine and 14, according to the Birmingham Post.

The opening of the clinic coincides with the release of reports from various medical officials that UK obesity is fast reaching epidemic levels, particularly among the nation's young.

"The project has snowballed and will run with 35 children for 12 months," commented Mark Powell, healthy heart co-ordinator for Walsall Primary Care Trust. "At the moment there are no plans to expand until the funders can see whether it has been effective, but the feedback so far is very encouraging.

"Children have already reported losing weight after only two sessions."

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Council considers going online with restaurant records

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Bradford Council has announced that it is considering publishing restaurants' health records online in a pioneering new scheme intended to boost consumer confidence in the region's eating venues.

A website called 'Eat Out, Eat Well' would allow people to check the performance ratings of restaurants, showing environmental health inspectors' verdicts and providing a star rating for kitchen cleanliness and working practices.

The decision to publicise this information follows a recent food poisoning outbreak that left 340 ill and 46 hospitalised. It is hoped that the pressure of bad publicity and the lure of good publicity will bring about improvements.

"It seems right that good restaurants are praised and bad ones encouraged to improve," David Clapham, principal environmental health manager for Bradford Council, told the Telegraph and Argus.

"But the legal issues appear to be overwhelming at this stage. It could be we have an awards ceremony instead. We want visitors to Bradford to feel confident in any restaurant they choose to eat in."

If the website goes ahead, it is expected to be operational by April 2005.

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Fine foods grow in popularity

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

New figures indicate that the consumption of fine foods in the UK is on the increase, with a growing number of UK consumers opting for classier food and drink for their meal solutions.

A Datmonitor report entitled "Fine Dining At Home" predicts that UK sales of fine foods will see a 31 per cent increase to sit at £5.5 billion by 2008, currently at £4.2 billion.

Commentators argue that the growing consumption of fine foods is being driven in part by increased availability in supermarkets and other local retailers. The report highlights growth in disposable income as another key factor in the demand for fine dining in the home.

Andrew Russell, Consumer Markets Analyst at Datamonitor and author of the report, explained these trends to Daily Research News Online:

"One of the most important trends in grocery over the past ten years has been the emergence of the market for organic, natural and fresh produce.

"This rapidly growing market stands as proof that today's consumers are prepared to spend a premium on food provided that they can see a clear value in it for them."

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Salmon sales plummet

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Scottish salmon sales are reported to have fallen dramatically following reports that the produce is among the most contaminated in the world.

Figures released by UK supermarkets reveal that consumers are opting against domestic salmon, instead buying fish from alternative sources, including New Zealand and North America.

According to new data salmon sales in some European countries sales have dropped by 80 per cent, resulting in an overall revenue drop of some £10 million and the threatening of thousands of jobs in the industry.

Brian Simpson, chief executive of Scottish Quality Salmon, commented on these developments to the Scotsman:

"Some retailers have quoted a 25 per cent downturn and for others it has been even higher. Over the past four weeks there has been a 20 per cent loss in sales worth about £10 million."

Despite these downwards trends the Food Standards Agency is recommending that consumers continue eating Scottish salmon, highlighting that that the dioxins and PCBs found in the study were within safety levels set by the World Health Organisation and European Commission.

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EU moves towards preventing GM imports

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The European Union is taking measures against the influx of genetically modified foods from ten east European countries due to join the Union in May.

A number of the countries scheduled to ascend into the EU have been growing GM crops for a number of years but recent checks have shown that the testing facilities to monitor their spread to neighbouring crops are either flawed or non-existent.

Poland, the largest agricultural country in East Europe, is reported to have no testing facilities at all.

In an attempt to help countries without such facilities enter the EU with minimal complications regarding GM production, Union officials has decided to help in the establishment of laboratories that can detect genetic modification in crops and foodstuffs.

Beate Gminder, a spokeswoman for the health and consumer protection directorate of the European commission, asserts that the problem will be solved by May, arguing against criticism that EU enlargement is being used as a means of introducing GM into Europe.

"According to the law, all products containing GM will have to be labelled," she told Novinite. "If countries did not have the testing facilities or expertise to check their products they could contract the work to countries and laboratories that could do the work. I am sure everyone understands that."

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Transatlantic alliances may aid European farmers

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

European farmers are being urged to form alliances with their US counterparts as a means of boosting world trade operations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Speaking at the annual Sentry Farms Conference Bob Stallman, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, asserted that this is the next logical step following the recent decoupling of EU farm support.

"We believe that the time is right for additional EU policy reform in areas such as export subsidies and market access," he stated, according to the Scotsman.

Mr Stallman also maintains that alliances would place the EU in a stronger position in World Trade Organisation talks as well as help release resources to meet the costs of EU expansion.

In regards to CAP reforms, he argues that farmers should not consider them anything more than a transitory mechanism:

"The real issue for farmers is evolving food production, energy and environmental goods into a viable, stand-alone business," he said, adding, "you must accept new realities and meet the demands of the market. It is far better to invent your own future than to predict it."

Experts consider medicinal benefits of mushrooms

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Scientists are looking into the potential health benefits of certain varieties of mushroom, researching how then can be used to combat such diseases as cancer, HIV, AIDS and hepatitis.

According to information from officials of Mohammed Al Zadjali and Partner Trading Co, stockists of food supplements manufactured from mushroom extracts, extensive research is currently being conducted in the UK.

Reports state that Cancer Research UK has been looking at the way medicinal mushrooms are used in Japan, China and Korea to fight cancer tumours and stimulate the immune system.

In traditional Chinese medicine mushrooms have long since been used to tackle particular ailments. Most new research is focussing on a few specific species including shitake (*lentinulaedodes*), reishi or lingzhi (*Ganoderma lucidium*), maitake (*Grifola frondosa*) and silverear (*Tremella fuciformis*).

"Some of these studies have been published and the health effects of these mushrooms have been associated with certain compounds in them," Dr Lim Siow Jin, chairman and CEO of the DXN Company told the Times of Oman.

"Depending on the species of mushrooms, research has shown that these compounds have various effects on the immune as well as the cardiovascular system."

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Defra details CAP reforms

Date: Tue, 17 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Department for Environment, Food and Agricultural Affairs (DEFRA) has confirmed how Common Agricultural Policy reforms agreed last June would be implemented in the future.

The group has announced that it will fully decouple all support payments, including dairy payments from January 1st 2005, with only farmers who are active in 2005 qualifying for their payments.

Due to the fact that farmers will have to meet 'cross compliance' requirements (based on environmental, health and welfare legislation) in order to receive their payments, the new scheme will enable DEFRA to more easily justify payments to farmers.

Under the scheme payments will be allocated to farmers on the basis of historic receipts. The country will be divided into two broad regions: severely disadvantaged areas (SDAs) and all other land, in which different flat rates will apply.

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Margaret Beckett asserts that this will result in a system that is more market focused, providing for a more sustainable long term future in English farming.

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Prince of Wales meets food retailers over seafood sustainability

Date: Tue, 17 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Prince of Wales today met a number of major seafood buyers to discuss the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), a global certification programme concerned with the provision of fish products in consumer markets.

The meeting took place to address the problem of falling fish stocks, worldwide, an issue that has long since been of concern to the Prince.

During a visit to Coldwater Seafood in Grimsby, the Prince met representatives from McDonald's, Marks & Spencer, Brakes and Spirit Group, all of who are supplied with fish products from Coldwater.

He stressed the need to establish a system that provides economic incentives to fisheries and effectively exploits the market power held by consumers, in addition to ensuring good practices regarding science and regulation.

"That is exactly what the Marine Stewardship Council does, and that is why I have been such a strong supporter of its work right from the start," he stated according to Port Focus.

"With two hundred MSC labelled products now on sale in 14 countries, it is clear that a significant number of consumers, retailers, food processors and food service providers are willing to support independent certification."

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Food exec defends pay package

Date: Tue, 17 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The chief executive of catering group Compass has come out in defence of a £1.6 million performance related bonus received in addition to his £910,000 salary.

Michael Bailey also took home a £333,000 profit from share options and was awarded shares worth some £1 million, on the proviso that future targets are met.

Criticisms have been voiced that the pay package is overly excessive, with over a quarter of investors voting against the remuneration report at the company's annual meeting yesterday.

However, bosses maintain that the pay is entirely representative, reflecting strong sales performances and signs of industry recovery over the last financial year.

"2004 started well and trading in the first four months of the current financial year has been in line with expectations," Sir Francis Mackay, Compass chairman stated, according to the Telegraph.

"We are well on track to securing the new business we need to be able to deliver at least 6pc like-for-like turnover growth and the new business pipeline remains encouraging," he added.
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Cartoon food promotion may boost economy by £78bn

Date: Tue, 17 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Experts are arguing that a healthy eating promotional campaign using cartoon characters to target school children could eventually net an extra £78 billion for the UK economy.

The "Food Dudes" project, developed at Wales' Bangor University has already been tested throughout the UK, including London, Glasgow and parts of Ireland.

The initiative encourages children to eat more fruit and vegetables at home and at school. Reading University says the project could lead to a massive increase in sales of fruit and veg, if it were introduced nationwide.

"There is a potential annual benefit to the national economy of £78 billion," argue the report's authors. "This estimate does not include the savings made on health care. For example the NHS spends £10 billion on coronary disease in the UK."

Politicians in Cardiff and Westminster are now being urged to consider adopting the scheme on a widespread basis.

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Morrisons to sell 132 Safeway stores

Date: Tue, 17 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

UK supermarket Wm Morrison has announced plans to sell 132 smaller Safeway stores upon completion of its £3 billion acquisition of the chain.

Originally, the group intended to keep the smaller stores despite having little experience of running convenience stores.

Experts argue that if the stores were sold with the rights to the Safeway brand name, they could attract a price tag as high as £300 million.

According to Aroq a number of convenience store groups and financial buyers have already expressed an interest in buying the portfolio of stores.

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FSA comments on fish concerns

Date: Tue, 17 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Food Standards Agency has responded to concerns over the consumption of fish by pregnant women, feared to contain dangerous levels of mercury.

The FSA asserts that though some types of fish contain more mercury than others, there is no risk posed for most people. However, the Agency warns that if a woman ingests high levels of mercury during pregnancy this can affect her baby's developing nervous system.

They also recommend that women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or intending to become pregnant should avoid eating shark, swordfish and marlin, and limit the amount of tuna eaten.

Tuna, though containing less mercury than shark, swordfish and marlin, contains higher levels than is found in cod, haddock, plaice and salmon.

Nonetheless, the FSA maintains that fish is an excellent source of protein containing essential vitamins and minerals.

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Free health foods for kids

Date: Tue, 17 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Toddlers across the UK are to receive free fruits and vegetables as part of a new initiative designed to encourage healthy eating among children and tackle the growing problem of child obesity in the UK.

Hundreds of thousands of parents will receive vouchers for the free produce in a move announced by UK Health Secretary John Reid.

An existing scheme grants eligible parents tokens for liquid milk and infant formula milk. These will be replaced with weekly vouchers that can be used to buy fresh produce as well as milk.

"Although I believe it's not the Government's role to lecture people how to live their lives, it is our responsibility to provide the means for them and their families to follow a healthier lifestyle," commented Mr Reid.

"The best way of tackling obesity is through encouraging a healthy diet at an early age. These changes mean that pregnant women, nursing mothers and younger children already

benefiting from the scheme will in future have a greater choice of healthy eating options, so reducing the chances of obesity."

All pregnant women under the age of 18 will also be eligible for the scheme, regardless of family income. It is estimated that some 800,000 people will benefit from the scheme, in total.

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Bird Flu prompts Uniq to consider sale of UK poultry operations

Date: Wed, 18 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Uniq plc has announced that it is considering the sale of its UK-based poultry business following the proliferation of avian flu and the Burger King business at the beginning of the financial year.

The flu outbreak has had an adverse impact upon a number of non-integrated poultry businesses in the UK, with demand among consumers having seen significant falls since the beginning of the year.

The poultry industry is expected to post losses of £3 million at the end of the current financial year, having made an operating profit of £5 million in the year ended March 31st 2003.

At Uniq, these difficulties have impacted negatively upon profitability at unit level and on a wider level, regarding the group as a whole.

Official announcements on the future of Uniq's poultry operations are expected in the coming months, with a number of parties rumoured to be interested in the sale.

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Parmalat UK bought by Dale Farm

Date: Wed, 18 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Dale Farm has confirmed the purchase of the UK dairy operations of Italy's Parmalat, recently involved in scandal over bankruptcy.

Dale Farm has acquired Parmalat's dairy processing activities at Kendal in northern England, responsible for the production of products under the Losely and Lakeland Maid brands, for an undisclosed sum.

The acquisition will extend the Northern Ireland group's portfolio of yoghurts, dessert and cottage cheese products, which "compete within the dairy sector's fastest-growing category", chief executive David Dobbin asserted, according to Business World.

Reports state that Dale plans to retain employment at the plant, currently employing some 200 staff workers and generating annual turnover of £30 million.

The group also plans to invest £20m in its manufacturing operations, of which more than £12m has already been committed.

In late 2003, Parmalat revealed a multibillion-dollar discrepancy in the accounts of a Cayman Islands unit, forcing it to request bankruptcy protection.

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Chip fans pay homage to the fry

Date: Wed, 18 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

National Chip Week has begun with special promotions and events being held to celebrate one of Britain's favourite snacks.

Local chip-shops throughout the counties will be offering free portions of chips as well as larger prizes. The British Potato Council has also organised the distribution of scratchcards for the event.

Verity Venter, co-owner of Cookies, Market Drayton, has expressed her and her colleagues' full support of the chop celebrations.

"We are going very well so far and because it's half term we are always busy," she told the Shropshire Star. "Lots of the school children come in for their cones."

Britain consumes 38,000 tonnes of chips each week, a figure that industry stakeholders is looking to increase in the near future.

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New Sainsbury's boss stands down

Date: Wed, 18 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The newly appointed deputy chairman at supermarket group J Sainsbury has withdrawn from his position following shareholder disapproval.

It was announced last week that Sir Ian Prosser would take up his position immediately, with a view to eventually replacing Sir Peter Davis as chairman in 2005.

However, shareholders expressed upset over the appointment on the basis of Sir Ian's rack record at leisure group Six Continents, where he was connected to poor shareholder returns and said to demonstrate an inflexible attitude towards shareholders.

"The board of J Sainsbury Plc and Sir Ian Prosser have each considered carefully the reaction of certain institutional shareholders consulted on the appointment," said Sainsbury's in a statement.

"As a result, Sir Ian has concluded that it would not be in the best interests of the company to proceed," it was added.

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New berry launched on UK market

Date: Wed, 18 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new type of berry hailing from Canada has been released on the UK market, after ten years of availability in Canadian stores.

The saskatoon berry, featuring an almond-cherry taste profile, has been launched in the UK by J.O. Sims, representing the extension of the existing range of berry products. It is hoped by bosses at the company that British food producers will adopt the new berry in their innovations.

"This is a big opportunity for the food industry, particularly those working in bakery and beverages, and those looking for novel ingredients," Jim McKee at the fruits ingredients company told FoodNavigator.com.

According to J.O. Sims the flavour of saskatoons, also known as Juneberries, shadberries or serviceberries, gives manufacturers the advantage of providing a nutty flavour without actually having nuts in the factory.

Use of the berries is expected to see strong growth in the next three to five years, boosted in part by their promotion on the grounds of health benefits.

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Whitty backs home grown produce

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Lord Whitty has urged the UK to make more use of home grown produce, calling for a greater emphasis on domestic procurement.

The Defra Minister said he believed locally produced food could cater for the needs of the public sector, providing a high quality of food and also giving a boost to food producers.

The BBC reports that a two-year project has been developed to increase the number of regionally grown food sourced by four London hospitals.

Lord Whitty went on to detail changes he believed were necessary to develop the procurement process.

"One of the reasons why we are focusing on public procurement in hospitals, schools, the armed services and so on, is that there is a lower percentage of UK produce procured in the public sector than you would find in a supermarket," he explained.

"Farmers and British producers generally need to be competitive to get the supermarket trade. So it is not a question of competitiveness, but a question of how the system works," Lord Whitty added.

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APV Baker announces candy colouring breakthrough

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

APV Baker has announced that it has developed multi-colour and multi-component capability for depositing systems.

The new four-colour depositing can give high added value for a variety of effects including both random 'marbling' and deliberate patterns. Effects are created by using opaque or translucent colours, or a combination of the two.

The UK company claims its new technology will provide manufacturers with the freedom to create a diversity of hard candies. The technology allows the creation of two distinct textures, for example two-coloured striped candies can be produced with either a soft or hard centre or hard centred confectionery can be produced with contrasting flavours.

APV Baker is now awaiting a patent for the invention, which uses a bank of four hoppers, each containing a different coloured candy syrup, to deliver a 'one-shot' deposit.

The company says that it has already installed three component systems in Europe to produce centre-fill and three-colour lollipops and candies.

APV Baker claims that the new design provides quality advantages including a smoother 'mouth feel' with quicker flavour release and complete control throughout the system, leading to extremely high dimensional and shape accuracy.

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Birmingham identified as fairtrade centre

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A Birmingham-based campaign group is attempting to turn the city into the UK's biggest fairtrade city this year.

The Fairtrade Association of Birmingham plans to encourage retailers and catering companies to sell products that don't lead to the exploitation of third world workers.

In order to succeed in its bid to make Birmingham the UK's biggest fair-trade city by the end of 2004, the group must persuade 100 retailers and 50 catering companies to stock fairtrade food.

There are already more than 30 towns and cities which have been given fairtrade status but, if the campaign is a success, Birmingham will become the biggest city to be awarded the title.

Eliot Whittington, of Oxfam in the West Midlands, said Birmingham may receive its new title by the autumn, as many retailers including Costa Coffee, Pret a Manger and Oxfam shops were already selling fairtrade products.

The city council has also agreed to offer fairtrade products at committee meetings.

The campaign is supported by the city council, Oxfam, the Midlands Co-operative Society and the Fairtrade Foundation.

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Kit Kat curries favours

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Nestle Rowntree is planning to launch a curry flavoured version of its most popular chocolate bar.

In a bid to boost flagging sales of Kit Kats, Nestle is combining the UK's favourite takeaway with the UK's favourite chocolate.

Sales of the bar plummeted by almost ten per cent last year to £95.2 million prompting Nestle to act.

The firm has now also developed plans to launch a lemon cheesecake Kit Kat, which has already proved popular in Germany and Japan.

New company managing director Chris White said: "We're doing this to sell more, make more money and grow market share."

Other new flavours being tested for the bar include liquorice, saffron and passion fruit.

Kit Kat was first launched in 1935 as Rowntree's Chocolate Crisp, becoming Kit Kat in 1937. It went on to become Britain's leading confectionery and biscuit brand

Meanwhile, one of the UK's favourite chocolate bars, Wispa, has been axed by Cadbury Schweppes following falling sales. It will be relaunched as Dairy Milk Bubbly.

Industry analysts claim that growing awareness of healthy eating is putting people off chocolate bars.

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Downing Street considers introducing 'fat tax'

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Plans for a controversial new "fat tax" on junk food are being considered by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit.

Reports in the Times suggest that plans for the tax are now advanced, as the Government seeks to stem the rising levels of obesity, particularly among the young.

The Strategy Unit document, entitled Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour, suggested a range of public policy initiatives aimed at tackling the increasingly pertinent issues surrounding the health of the nation, including a national drive to encourage participation in sport, and placing warnings on food packaging.

"There might even be potential to consider fiscal measures - a "fatty food tax" - applied to food not people - or different VAT treatment for foods with poor nutritional standards," the report read

A Number 10 spokesman acknowledged that a range of options were being considered to tackle the disease, but insisted that no firm decision had yet been taken.

Between 1996 and 2001, the proportion of overweight children aged six to 15 increased by seven per cent.

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Cabinet leak points to commercial roll-out of GM crops

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The development of the genetically modified food industry has been given a boost today with the news that the government is on the verge of sanctioning commercial cultivation of GM crops.

A leaked series of cabinet committee papers suggests that the British government has decided to push ahead with developing the industry, despite misgivings in some quarters.

Speculation has been growing since the UK government lent its support to an application for the importing of genetically modified grain for use as animal feed earlier this week.

Environment and Agri-Environment Minister Elliot Morley stressed that the move was simply designed to sanction animal feed rather than human consumption, adding that no firm rule had yet been established for GM as a whole.

"Current EU legislation requires a case-by-case assessment of all applications on the basis of the scientific evidence - and that is what we have done," he said.

A number of environmental groups expressed their disappointment over the impending decision, deriding it as "irresponsible".

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Britain's unhealthy diet continues

Date: Fri, 20 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Britons are adopting an increasingly unhealthy diet according to new figures published today.

A major study by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed that the average UK household is spending less per week on fresh fruit and vegetables than it does on alcohol.

Just £5.40 is spent on fresh fruit and vegetables, prompting further worries over the rising levels of obesity in the country.

The survey also revealed that expenditure in the household on chocolate, sweets, cakes, biscuits and soft drinks was a priority, accounting for £6.10 per week.

The Expenditure and Food Survey examined spending habits from April 2002 to March 2003, with the ONS looking at weekly spending patterns of a representative sample of almost 7,000 UK households, using a scale of ten income groups.

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Experts identify salmonella food poisoning increase

Date: Fri, 20 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Eggs prepared by caterers are responsible for a big increase in salmonella, health experts warned today.

Investigations by the Health Protection Agency revealed that cases of S Enteritidis PT14b rose from 200 a year prior to 2001, to 922 in 2003.

During 2002 there were three large outbreaks affecting over 450 people in the UK, and in 2003 a national outbreak affected over 500 people.

Investigators, led by Dr Sarah O'Brien, interviewed people who had fallen ill and compared the foods they had eaten.

They concluded that people who had been ill "were more likely to have consumed eggs outside the home", placing the emphasis on preparation.

"Caterers need to remember that raw shell egg can be contaminated with Salmonella. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is hard, and any products containing raw or lightly cooked eggs should be made using pasteurised eggs," said Dr O'Brien.

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US survey finds 24m follow low-carb diets

Date: Fri, 20 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

As many as 24 million adults in the US may be on a low-carbohydrate diet, new research claims.

The figure, which represents around 11 per cent of American adults, is enough to affect commodity prices and food industry decisions, according to research firm Opinion Dynamics.

The poll of 1,800 adults found that 11 per cent were following a diet that restricts grains, pastas, fruits and starchy vegetables, while a further 19 per cent said they would probably try a similar diet in the next two years.

The rise in popularity of diets such as the Atkins Diet and the South Beach Diet has affected sales of products such as bread and orange juice and manufacturers now have to respond to the new market.

Cereal giant General Mills is introducing products with more protein and fewer carbohydrates, while Adolph Coors releases its low-carbohydrate Aspen Edge beer in March.

"This shows the low-carb diet has really become mainstream and is likely to have a permanent effect on our eating habits, much like the low-fat craze that swept the country a few years ago," Lawrence Shiman, a director at Opinion Dynamics, told Bloomberg.

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New freezing technology can boost food safety

Date: Fri, 20 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

New technology that can effectively kill off potentially harmful microbes has the capacity to boost food processors and convenience outlets according to research.

According to an industry expert writing in the International Journal of Food Microbiology new freezing technology can dramatically advance food convenience and quality.

US-based scientist Douglas Archer concluded that with more research a freezing technique could even be incorporated into public health strategies, boosting food safety.

"It is clear that under certain conditions, freezing can be lethal for certain foodborne pathogens. It also seems clear that there are researchable areas that might lead to increased use of freezing as a barrier to foodborne pathogens," Archer wrote.

"It seems that freezing may be an underutilised food safety technology that can be enhanced to become a major hurdle for pathogen survival."

Archer himself is well known in the industry as a past deputy director of the Centre for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition of the US Food and Drug Administration.

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Concern growing over low-carb diets for kids

Date: Fri, 20 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Paediatricians and nutritionists are warning that low-carbohydrate diets are not a good idea for children, as they need many of the nutrients found in foods such as bread, potatoes, rice and fruit, for development.

Experts agree that cutting down on refined sugars and starches in foods such as cookies and bagels is a positive change, but caution against low-carb diets for growing children.

There are no figures for the number of children on low-carb diets, as few young dieters consult a doctor or nutritionist, but medical professionals stress that children are influenced by their parents and peers, and need to maintain a balanced diet.

"A growing child needs a constant flow of ... carbohydrates, proteins and fats in set amounts," Dr Robert Gotlin, director of orthopaedics and sports medicine at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, told the Los Angeles Times.

Dr Gotlin warned that during the first two weeks on the Atkins plan, fruit, bread, pasta, grains, starchy vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans and most dairy products are banned, forcing the body to burn fat for energy and also depriving the brain of glucose, potentially dulling thinking and burning essential vitamins, minerals, calcium and fibre.

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Coke CEO announces resignation

Date: Fri, 20 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Coca-Cola chief executive Doug Daft has announced that he will step down at the end of 2004.

Mr Daft's time in office at the soft drinks giant has come in for some heavy criticism, with slow sales and poor share performance.

Coca-Cola said Mr Daft's retirement was unrelated to the company's problems, which have included a government accounting probe and fraud allegations in recent years.

Executives such as chief operating officer Steve Heyer are being tipped as replacements, though the company has stated that it will also be looking at external candidates.

Mr Daft, 60, cited his "own personal wishes" as the reason for his departure, in a statement issued by the company. He said that Coca-Cola had faced significant challenges since he was appointed in 1999 to the top job.

"Today our brands are stronger and our global production and marketing systems has been restored to health," Mr Daft added. "I am proud of what we have accomplished."

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Anti-obesity measures may target fast food toys

Date: Mon, 23 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

New plans under consideration by UK health officials could prohibit the use of toys to promote fast foods in children's meals, in a bid to reverse growing obesity trends.

The proposals are in response to concerns that popular fast food chains such as McDonalds and Burger king are attracting children to regularly eat unhealthy foods with the offer of free toys.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has warned fast food chains that it may recommend legislation to ban toy giveaways, according to the Scotsman. A number of public meetings on the issue are to be staged across the country.

"They are going to be looking at things like how McDonald's and Burger King target kids with toys," said an FSA spokesperson.

"Once we get their viewpoint, the agency will make representations to ministers. We're going to formulate new legislation."

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Diehl Specialities introduces low-carb dairy drink

Date: Mon, 23 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

US beverage manufacturer Diehl Specialities has developed a new low-carbohydrate dairy drink offering a low-carb alternative to traditional milk.

The beverage, called Lo-carb, contains two grams of carbohydrates per serving with 12 grams of protein and 365 grams of calcium.

Its development marks the continuing trend of reduced carbohydrate eating regimes popularised by the controversial Atkins diet. In recent months a number of food and drink manufacturers have innovated low-carb products including bread, tomato ketchup and soft drinks.

According to a study by the Natural Marketing Institute, over 25 million Americans have tried low carbohydrate diets, with sales of low-carb products rising steadily.

There is especially high consumer awareness for this new, low carbohydrate eating trend, and that drives consumer sales," Dave Lee, director of sales and marketing for Diehl Specialities, told Bevnet.

"The product is also easy for dairies to produce--all they need to do is add water and cream to the mix and then pasteurise," he added in reference to the new lo-carb dairy drink.

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Government funding for Australian innovation

Date: Mon, 23 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Australian government has launched a multi-million dollar investment scheme for national food manufacturers, intended to fund innovation and aid in research and development projects.

The Food Innovation Grants (FIG) will be awarded to six manufacturers announced by the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Judith Troeth.

Field Fresh Tasmania, Murray Goulburn and Amcor, Weston Technologies, Uncle Toby's Company, Tandou Wines and Lemnos Foods have each received grants ranging from \$345,900 to \$1.3 million, according to Ferret.

The FIG programme will provide somewhere in the region \$35 million to the food industry over a period of five years.

"The grants will be used to explore innovative ways to produce, manufacture and package existing and new food products," commented Senator Troeth. "Even more food companies will be assisted by the program with another \$14 million available for future proposals.

"Industry is also capitalising on the link between innovation and profitability, with private sector R&D investment growing by 23 per cent over the past two years - reaching its highest level at \$5.5 billion," she added.

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Milk Link and Glanbia enter UK joint venture

Date: Mon, 23 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Glanbia, Ireland's largest dairy producer has announced a new joint venture with Milk Link, one of the UK's leading cheese manufacturers.

The venture, called cheese Company Holdings is reported to be worth £22.5 million, in which Glanbia is to invest £5.6 million for a 25 per cent stake. Milk Link will pay £16.9 million for a 75 per cent holding.

CCH will be the second largest cheese producer in the UK, with strong positions in cheddar, Stilton and British territorial cheeses, supplying the retail, food service and ingredient sectors.

It will operate four cheese processing facilities and a consumer packing facility in Great Britain, and employ approximately 1,000 people, according to Business World.

Glanbia managing director, John Moloney commented: "This transaction will facilitate our strategic focus on high growth areas such as consumer products, dairy ingredients and in particular the nutrition market."

Bosses hope that the venture will serve as an additional means of distribution for their existing dairy products.

The venture follows Glanbia's recent announcement of a new innovation centre intended to develop functional foods and health ingredients, costing an estimated €15 million.

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UK salt consumption raises concerns

Date: Mon, 23 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

New figures report that British consumers are consuming more salt than is considered healthy, largely from store-bought processed foods.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) recommends adults and children over the age of 11 eat no more than six grams of salt a day, but statistics indicate that average salt intake is closer to 11 grams a day.

Consensus Action on Salt and Health, a group of medical experts concerned about the issue, claim around 35,000 deaths a year in the UK from strokes and heart attacks could be prevented if adults cut their intake of salt.

The food industry has made efforts to redress the problem with some notable success in certain sectors, such as bread production.

Calls have been made for manufacturers to label salt information more clearly on their products so as to avoid confusion among customers and allow them to better ascertain salt levels.

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New corrosion protection lubricant to improve food production

Date: Tue, 24 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new food grade protection lubricant developed by Kluber Lubrication promises to protect food and drink production equipment to higher standards than previously achieved.

Corrosion in food manufacture machinery is said to cost the industry millions each year. Kluberfood NH1 K32 gives such equipment an anti-corrosion coating that is resistant to temperatures ranging from 80C to minus 10C.

The lubricant can be used on both static and stationary metal parts, either in use or in storage.

German food production experts have touted the new product as the best anticorrosion-protecting product according to existing industry standards.

Samples will be available at Maintec 2004 between 16th to 18th March, at E7 and at Total 2004 from March 29th to April 1st at the UK NEC.

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GM crops to cut Chinese farming costs

Date: Tue, 24 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Chinese officials have outlined plans to commercialise genetically modified foods and further research biotech crop development in a bid to reduce national farming costs and boost crop supplies.

According to iwon.com China will spend some \$500 million per year developing new wheat varieties that can withstand insects, disease and herbicides from 2005 onwards.

The decision to focus on GM farming has been spurred in part by the popularisation of GM cotton on the Chinese market, which since 1996 has helped farmers cut costs by 28 per cent.

Scott Rozzelle, part of a US task force advising the Chinese government on farm and rural policy, has voiced expectations that GM rice will be commercialised in China within the decade.

"I think if they release GM rice, you should certainly expect to see the genetically modified wheats follow," he stated, adding, "I think that they're going to be in the market more and more for Canadian wheat or for high-quality US wheat."

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Food expert identifies 14 'superfoods'

Date: Tue, 24 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A US doctor has selected 14 different foods he claims has definite medical and health benefits, including the slowing of the aging process.

A variety of food types are included in the list, ranging from fruits and vegetables such as beans, blueberries, broccoli and oranges to meats including turkey and salmon and dairy products such as yoghurt.

The foods identified by Dr Steven Pratt all contain vitamins or minerals that help protect against some of the health threats particularly facing older people, including certain cancers, obesity and diabetes.

According to Dr Pratt each food must be eaten four times a week to achieve the best benefits afforded by the antioxidants they contain.

The complete list of "superfoods" is beans, blueberries, broccoli, oats, oranges, pumpkin, salmon, soy, spinach, green and black tea, tomatoes, turkey, walnuts and yoghurt.

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Experts confirm health benefits of organic milk

Date: Tue, 24 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

New research into the benefits of organic milk as opposed to the traditional variety indicates that organic milk is significantly healthier, affording greater nutritional benefits when consumed regularly.

A study published by the Aberystwyth-based Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research has found organic milk has higher levels of essential nutrients than conventional milk, with samples found to contain two-thirds more Omega 3 fatty acids.

Medical experts assert that these fatty acids are essential for good health, said to maintain a healthy heart, offset arthritis and help in the development of unborn infants.

Organic sales are reported to have grown considerably in recent years, with organic milk sales showing growth of over 30 per cent year on year, according to the Western Mail.

In light of the new research organic dairy farmers are calling for the Food Standards Agency to recognise the health benefits afforded by organic milk. Sir John Krebs, FSA chair, has in the past questioned the health benefits of organic produce.

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MP proposes junk food ban in schools

Date: Tue, 24 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A Welsh Labour MP has made calls for a complete ban of unhealthy junk foods from all UK schools in a bid to combat the rising obesity epidemic among British children.

Jon Owen Jones has announced plans to introduce a bill in the House of Commons that would prevent schools selling high fatty food and drinks to their pupils.

"At the age of six, one in five children are overweight, and one in 10 are obese," he told the BBC. "By the age of 15 this has risen to 31 per cent and 17 per cent.

"Banning junk food from vending machines will not solve this problem but it is an important first step. We should not undo in the corridor all the work done in the classroom on healthy eating," he added.

A number of UK schools have already taken steps in this direction, replacing conventional vending machines with ones offering a range of healthier products such as water, milk and cereal bars. These moves mirror efforts being made in some parts of the US, where school junk food bans have already been enforced.

"I hope the government will listen to my arguments and legislate on this issue themselves," concluded Mr Jones.

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OFT reviews supermarket suppliers code

Date: Tue, 24 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Following an investigation into the Supermarkets Code of Practice the UK Office of Fair Trading has found that many suppliers believe the code is not being implemented effectively.

In a consultation with suppliers and trade associations the majority of respondents, some 85 per cent, claimed the code had not instigated any significant change in supermarkets' behaviour, according to Aroq.

Looking to further substantiate these claims the OFT has announced further work to ascertain how supermarkets deal with suppliers under the code. The OFT has not received any specific complaints over alleged breaches of the code to date.

"Our review has shown that dissatisfaction among suppliers with the Supermarkets Code continues. The purpose of the audit is to enable the OFT to establish hard facts about the supermarkets' compliance with the code," said OFT executive director Penny Boys.

"This is necessary to assess the suppliers' concerns. We will then be in a better position to decide on any further action."

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Dairy farmers pioneer new 'sleep milk'

Date: Wed, 25 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A Somerset dairy farm has developed a new type of milk it claims can aid in a good night's sleep following recent discoveries in milking technology.

It has been found that cows milked before dawn produce milk high in melatonin, the chemical that instigates drowsiness in humans.

Using this discovery, researchers at Cricketer Farm in Bridgwater have innovated a new type of milk dubbed 'Night Time Milk', containing twice as much melatonin as normal milk.

"We have already had people telling us that it has improved their sleep patterns," stated Mike Hind, marketing manager for the new product.

"A similar product is available in Finland and with so many people suffering from sleep problems in this country we thought it would be a niche market for us here," he added.

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Specialist 'chocolatiers' go mainstream

Date: Wed, 25 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Retailers specialising in unique, upmarket chocolate products are entering the mainstream market with growing frequency, according to new industry reports.

Dubbed 'chocolatiers', specialist retailers such as Thorntons are branching into high streets and town centre shopping malls, offering their products in existing stores and supermarkets.

Since 2001 Thorntons has added Sainsbury's and Tesco to its distribution list, offering its brand to wider range of customers.

Peter Burdon, chief executive, commented on these developments to Food and Drink Europe:

"The rate of increase in sales of Thorntons branded products outside of Thorntons own shops over the next year or two is expected to accelerate further, such that it will rapidly become a significant contributor in our growth," he stated.

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Salt content slashed in new BRC scheme

Date: Wed, 25 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Following the government's plans to reduce salt usage throughout the food chain and particularly in processed food, the British Retail Consortium has revealed British food retailers have joined a new campaign.

Predicting future salt reductions of up to 25 per cent, the campaign has so far identified nine processed food groups, according to Ireland Online.

Under the new scheme retailers will work towards aiming to reduce salt in own brand processed food goods such as ready meals, pizzas and soups.

At least two groups will be tackled within the first 12 months of the program.

The BRC plans to have all nine food groups' salt content reviewed and cut down within the next five years.

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ISP to gain innovative production tools in new acquisition

Date: Wed, 25 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

ISP Food Specialities, the UK arm of the US firm International Specialty Products is to gain a new range of production tools in its portfolio following the acquisition of Red Carnation Gums (RCG).

RCG will provide ISP with emulsifiers, stabilisers and gelling systems, extending the company's portfolio and boosting its technological capabilities.

Bosses assert that the company has been looking to consolidate its position in the market, last year having purchased the Brazilian ingredient systems company Germinal that supplies meat and dairy producers in southern Latin America.

"ISP continues to seek acquisitions of companies that have high value food ingredient and speciality chemical products with strong technical competencies," commented Sunil Kumar, CEO of ISP, according to Food Production Daily.

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UK health review calls for prevention over cure for diet problems

Date: Wed, 25 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new report on health problems in the UK will state the case for prevention of diet-related problems such as obesity.

According to Derek Wanless, author of the review, food producers should do more to innovate and develop products that take consumer health into consideration.

Additionally, experts argue that manufacturers should improve labelling on processed goods in order to give consumers a better idea of the nutritional values of their foods.

The government and consumers themselves are also being highlighted as being responsible for helping prevent the spread of health related ailments.

"We need to move from sickness services' said Mr Wanless on Radio 4, "looking after chronic disease well, to helping people to stay in good health. All the vested interests must play a part."

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Manufacturers look to whey for production innovation

Date: Wed, 25 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Industry experts are considering the benefits afforded by using whey in dairy production as a value added food ingredient for the industry as a whole.

According to a new report from UK-based Zenith International eastern Europe is already being targeted for development by local and international companies, ahead of the ascension of ten new countries in to the European Union.

The production of whey has been highlighted as important in the development of these countries' food industries, and commentators argue that it may soon become a key factor in other European economies.

"Compared with established west European markets, demand for whey products in the East European accession states remains underdeveloped," explained Zenith Market consulting manager John Meropoulos to Food Production Daily.

"However, the rate of progress over the past three years has been impressive, particularly in the production of sweet whey powder, which has increased by 30 per cent since 2000 to nearly 111,000 tonnes in 2003," he added.

It has been argued that the growing demand for functional foods in west Europe will help spur the development of the whey industry,
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Biotech conference raises GM debate

Date: Thu, 26 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A United Nations conference on biotechnology and the food industry has spurred further debate on the adoption of GM production methods and the international take up of GM foods.

Concerns were raised that GM food production could have negative repercussions on the health of nearby residents, with one expert citing a 2003 study in which villagers living next to a plantation of biotech maize in the southern Philippines suffered fevers and respiratory, intestinal and skin ailments.

The US was criticised by some European delegates for not acknowledging the potential threats of GM farming, with Richard White, director of Sanitary Affairs in the Office of the US Trade Representative, stating: "Consumers in the United States are, by and large, not interested or concerned about biotech products in their food."

The US is currently the world's largest producer of GM crops and is contesting the EU's de-facto embargo on the import of bio-engineered food in the World Trade Organisation.

Environmental group Friends of the Earth also voiced concerns that large biotech corporations have yet to prove the benefits of GM food for both producers and consumers.
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New sensor to improve liquid level measurement

Date: Thu, 26 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Product Innovation, a UK-based development group has released a new sensor designed to more accurately and efficiently measure liquid levels in food production.

The Optical Level Sensor (OLS) is not affected by conductivity or temperature thus being able to provide more accurate measurements, promising significant gains to the multi-million pound liquid level measuring market.

Additionally probe length can be specified, LED sensors can be more focused to a certain area of the probe to concentrate on key areas of concern and a flat base design means the OLS can get particularly close to the bottom of tanks.

"This huge industry is constantly expanding," managing director at Product Innovation, Peter Frank told the EE Times. "The capacitance market in Europe alone is worth over \$100 million a year, but it needs a more accurate and reliable device that is attractively priced."

A license for the OLS is now available for interested manufacturers.
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London healthy eating scheme launched

Date: Thu, 26 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A new scheme designed to help supply fresh food to local residents in East London is to be launched by Deputy Mayor of London Jenny Jones.

The Mobile Food Store will provide fresh produce to housing estates, including fruit and vegetables as well as other essentials such as fresh milk, baby food.

Ms Jones, also Green Party London Assembly Member and recently appointed Chair of London Food, has outlined the benefits of the scheme and hopes it can be extended to other parts of the capital.

"It is tragic that many people in housing estates can't get to shops selling fresh produce and have to rely on unhealthy, processed and snack foods," she stated, adding, "it is appalling that up to 30% of East End children do not eat breakfast.

"This wandering shop is a revolutionary idea and I would like to see many more across the capital."

Ms Jones will be hosting 'Food access and social housing in London' on 5 March 5th, a conference intended to look at ways to start, run and sustain food access in social housing in London.

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FDF opposes proposed boycott of fast food brands

Date: Thu, 26 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Food and Drink Federation (FDF) has come out in support of food manufacturers accused of producing unhealthy foods following the announcement of plans by the Consumer's Association to boycott some leading brands.

Health experts assert that growing health problems in the UK are linked directly to junk foods, and the CA claims that poor diet is now responsible for more deaths than smoking, according to the Times.

As well as launching a new advertising campaign designed to raise awareness of the issue, the association is demanding a commitment from the Government to set up a nutrition council and to ban advertising of all foods high in sugar, salt and fat from children's television and cinemas.

In response the FDF argues that these measures may be excessive, maintaining that there are no problems with individual food types.

"All food on sale in the UK is safe to eat," said the FDF in a statement. "Demonising individual foods and brands is not the way to educate people to eat a healthy diet.

"You can eat cream cakes and chips in a diet, but people should not eat them all the time."

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Organic suppliers provide school meal solutions

Date: Thu, 26 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Organic suppliers in Yorkshire are building links with local schools in a bid to improve eating habits among the regions children.

The Soil Association's Yorkshire Organic Centre has been in operation for a year, in which time two local schools have decided to source local, organic produce through it.

"In the face of nationwide concern about childhood obesity, these schools are taking practical and effective steps to improve the diet of children in their care," Peter Melchett, the Soil Association's policy director told Farming Life.

"North Yorkshire is one of several examples around the country where local food suppliers and schools are getting together to improve the quality of school meals," he added.

Regional schools have outlined plans to extend links with organic producers, and some have already opted out of contract catering.

Over the past year Yorkshire and Humberside has seen the fastest rate of increase in organic farms in the UK, rising up from 115 to 149, and reports indicate that consumers in the area are prepared to pay more for local organic produce than elsewhere in the country.

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Cereal and fruit rank first for healthy hearts

Date: Thu, 26 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

New research suggests that fruits and cereals contain enough fibre to significantly reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and generally improve heart health, with the intake of only ten grammes daily.

The findings are further proof of the link between fibre and heart health, and also reaffirm the benefits of fruit and cereal in particular, researchers finding vegetable fibre to be less useful in improving health.

The uses of fibre are achieving increasing international recognition. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorised several health claims referring to the positive effects of a high fibre, low fat diet in helping to lower the risk of coronary heart disease and cancer,

Additionally, according to Food Navigator, the European Union is presently considering a regulation on health claims to possibly include a health claim for fibre content in foods.

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Wrapid offers innovative packaging solutions

Date: Fri, 27 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

UK-based food packaging firm Wrapid has announced the launch of a new budget automatic packaging machine that developers claim offers significant cost savings over traditional semi-automatic solutions.

The Compacta Trend can operate at speeds of up to 20 packs per minute, featuring side sealing, and according to Wrapid, can wrap items up to almost any size in length.

This makes it particularly useful in the wrapping of awkwardly shaped items such as egg boxes. Wrapid managing director Peter Birkinhead commented on these features to Food Production daily:

"The Trend incorporates many of the features of the bigger Compacta and is an ideal entry level automatic wrapping machine," he said.

The machine also incorporates a Siemens-built control system that can be synchronised with other end-of-line packing machines as is necessary.

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Manufacturer develops low-carb gum

Date: Fri, 27 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A US manufacturer has launched a new gum claiming to offer a low-carb solution to the snack and energy bar market, furthering the growing popularity of low-carb diets among consumers worldwide.

Growing demands for low-carb products has led manufacturers to invest in the development a variety of new products including breads, soft drinks, condiments and confection.

TIC Gums' new product, a pre-hydrated gum Arabic, is designed for use in the production of sweets, baked goods and energy bars. Mar B. Nieto, director of technical services for TIC Gums commented on its uses to Food Production Daily:

"Gum arabic could be used as a partial replacement or full replacement of corn syrups in granola bars, candy bars, snack clusters, cookies and other similar products. Gum arabic has a low viscosity that makes it possible to prepare it into a syrup at high concentration."

Developers maintain that in syrup form, the gum acts like a high-carb agent while actually being substantially low in carbohydrate levels.

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Coca-Cola to sponsor Football League

Date: Fri, 27 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Football League has taken a major step in their bid to compete with the Premiership after signing a lucrative new sponsorship deal with major soft drinks manufacturer Coca Cola.

Coca-Cola has agreed a three-year deal with the League, which will bring to an end Nationwide Building Society's current links with Division's One, Two and Three.

The deal will begin from the 2004-05 season and is hoped to result in a big financial injection for a league that has struggled financially in recent years.

Concerns have been raised that manufacturers of junk food and drink products are encouraging obesity by promoting their products to children using sport. McDonalds was recently criticised for a promotional campaign featuring sports celebrities such as Lawrence Dallaglio.

Nonetheless Sir Brian Mawhinney, the Football League's chairman has expressed optimism over the deal.

"This new agreement is good news, it provides a tremendous boost for League clubs and, on their behalf, it is a great pleasure to welcome Coca-Cola to this partnership," he said.

"Attracting a brand of the stature of Coca-Cola is clearly a coup for The League and demonstrates the enduring appeal of our competition."

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Food industry commits to salt reduction drive

Date: Fri, 27 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

Food manufacturers in the UK have confirmed their commitment to a programme intended to reduce the levels of salt in processed foods, in light of growing concerns over the health problems posed by excess salt in diets.

The drive is part of an ongoing industry-wide bid to lower salt levels. Last year, salt reductions were implemented in breakfast cereals, soups and sauces, as well as a per cent reduction in sliced bread.

Building on this bakers in the UK have stated plans to reduce salt content in bread by a further five per cent before the end of the year, following an agreement with the Food Standards Agency.

Additionally, a survey carried out by the Biscuit Cake Chocolate and Confectionery Association indicated that some producers has achieved reductions of 10 per cents or more on individual products.

Proposals for salt reduction in the meat industry are to be developed by the Food and Drink Federation's Meat Group and the British Meat Processors Association, in conjunction with the Meat and Livestock Commission.

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NFU welcomes Dairy Premium top-up plans

Date: Fri, 27 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

The Cymru arm of the National Farmers Union (NFU) has welcomed news that dairy farmers will be offered a top-up of the existing Dairy Premium under Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms.

Payments will be based on the milk quota available to claimants on March 31st, with the payment window for additional payments being between December 1st 2004 and June 30th 2005.

Welcoming the move, NFU Cymru deputy president Dai Davies said: "The announcement is just what we have advocated all along.

"It is the most sensible way forward for the dairy industry in Wales and fits in with the key aim of CAP reform, that is to create a simpler, far less bureaucratic system," he added.

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Low-carb diets may be bad for children, argues experts

Date: Fri, 27 Feb 04 **Type:** DirectNews Item

Analysis

A number of paediatricians and nutritionists in the US are suggesting that low-carb diets may pose significant health concerns for children.

Despite arguments that heavy reductions in carbohydrate intake can aid in weight loss and improve diets, experts maintain that foods such as bread, potatoes, rice and fruit contain important nutrients that are necessary for growing bodies.

Figures indicate that almost 60 million US adults have adopted some form of low-carb diets to date, with an estimated 17 million on high-protein varieties such as the Atkins regime.

Though there are no exact figures pertaining to how many of these are children, it is likely that the number of younger low-carb advocates is growing.

"A growing child needs a constant flow of carbohydrates, proteins and fats in set amounts," Dr. Robert Gotlin, orthopedics and sports medicine expert told the Charlotte Observer.

He continued to argue that dietary restrictions imposed by low-carb regimes deprive the brain of glucose, potentially dulling thinking, while sacrificing vitamins, minerals, calcium and fibre.

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