

Press release



**For immediate release
Monday 10th October 2005**

94 WHITE LION STREET LONDON N1 9PF
TEL: 020 7837 1228 FAX: 020 7837 1141
EMAIL: sustain@sustainweb.org
WEB: www.sustainweb.org

Top chefs tell PM to ban junk food marketing to kids

An open letter from more than twenty prominent food writers and chefs today calls on the Prime Minister to support the Children's Food Bill to protect children from being targeted by junk food advertisers. **The letter's signatories include Raymond Blanc, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Sophie Grigson, Marguerite Patten OBE, Gary Rhodes, Nigel Slater, Rick Stein and Antony Worrall Thompson.** [1]

Whilst welcoming recent announcements to introduce minimum nutritional standards for school food, [2] the letter calls upon the Government to end advertising and promotions which present junk food and drinks to children as positive and desirable choices. It also calls for practical food education to become part of the school curriculum for every child, "to stop the scandal of children leaving school knowing only how to open a packet or a tin".

Protecting children from junk food marketing and ensuring practical food education for all children are central provisions of the Children's Food Bill, which is already supported by more than 200 cross-party MPs, 150 national organisations and many thousands of parents. [3]

Publication of the letter takes place to coincide with National School Meals Week [4] and the Children's Food Bill launch in the House of Commons on Wednesday 12th October, to be hosted by the Bill's sponsor, Mary Creagh MP, and addressed by award-winning food writer Sophie Grigson. [5]

Mary Creagh, MP for Wakefield said, "I welcome Government proposals for nutrient standards for school meals and the removal of junk food from school vending machines. This is a victory for all those who have campaigned for better food in schools.

I want the Government to go further. Parents are tired of being pestered to buy unhealthy foods at supermarkets because their children recognise Bart Simpson or Shrek on the packet. Young people need to be educated about food so that they can make informed decisions about their diet which they can take into adult life."

Sophie Grigson, award-winning food writer said, "To change children's attitudes to food, we need to improve their food environments both in and out of school.

As well as presenting good appetising food on their plates, we must protect children from advertisements which promote unhealthy food and drinks, and make sure they learn the skills that enable them to prepare delicious healthy food from fresh ingredients".

For more information, please call:

Henry Gregg in Mary Creagh MP's office on 0207 219 6984 or 07980 298404;
Charlie Powell, Children's Food Bill Project Officer on 0207 837 1228 or 07817 746786; or
Jeanette Longfield, Co-ordinator of Sustain on 0207 837 1228

Notes to Editors

1. The open letter to the Prime Minister is dated 10th October 2005 and reads:

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
10 Downing Street London SW1A 2AA

Dear Tony

An open letter to the Prime Minister seeking support for the Children's Food Bill

We are writing to ask you to support the Children's Food Bill in its passage through Parliament. As food writers and broadcasters, chefs and promoters of good food, we believe that this Bill can turn around the decline in children's diets over the last 20 years. We stand alongside 150 national organisations, over 200 cross-party MPs and many thousands of concerned parents who already support the Bill.

Jamie's School Dinners highlighted the dire state of school food and we welcome recent Government announcements to introduce minimum nutritional standards and remove junk food from school vending machines. But there is still much more to do. Providing healthy, freshly cooked food on children's plates will require a kitchen in every school, training for catering staff, as well as funding for wholesome ingredients and the time for their preparation.

If we are to change children's attitudes to food, the Government must now act to end junk food advertising and promotions which influence children's food choices and undermine their health. And to stop the scandal of children leaving school knowing only how to open a packet or a tin, cooking and other practical food skills must become part of the school curriculum for every child.

As a father, you know how important healthy, good and enjoyable food is to the development of children. Making the Children's Food Bill law will ensure that all children – wherever they live and whatever their backgrounds – benefit from better food. They deserve nothing less.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Anthony, Food writer and broadcaster

Annie Bell, Food writer, Country Living, Mail on Sunday

Raymond Blanc, Chef and restaurateur

Jill Dupleix, Food writer, The Times

Richard, Earl of Bradford, Food writer and restaurateur

Fiona Hamilton-Fairley, Food writer and Principal of Kids' Cookery School

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Food writer and broadcaster

Peter Gordon, Chef and food writer

Felicity Green, Food writer

Henrietta Green, Food writer and organiser of Food Lovers Fairs

Sophie Grigson, Food writer and broadcaster

Richard Johnson, Food writer and broadcaster

Sue Lawrence, Food writer and President of the Guild of Food Writers

Jeanette Orrey, Author and award winning dinner lady

Marguerite Patten OBE, food writer and presenter

Gary Rhodes, Chef, restaurateur, food writer and broadcaster

Nigel Slater, Food writer and journalist

Rick Stein, Chef, restaurateur, food writer and broadcaster

Jane Sutherland, Food writer and Vice-President of the Guild of Food Writers
Mitchell Tonks, Food writer and restaurateur
Antony Worrall Thompson, Chef, restaurateur, food writer and broadcaster
Mitzie Wilson, Editor, Delicious magazine
Elisabeth Winkler, Writer and editor, Living Earth, Soil Association magazine

2. The Government's intention to introduce minimum nutrient standards for school meals and to remove junk foods from school vending machines was announced by Ruth Kelly at the Labour Party conference on Wednesday 28th September. These proposals are now subject of a DfES consultation, details of which are available from: www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/

3. A list of the MPs who have signed the 'Children's Food' Early Day Motion, EDM 378, in support of the Bill is available from: <http://edmi.parliament.uk/edmi/>

The 150 national organisations already support the campaign for the Children's Food Bill includes many prominent medical, health and consumer organisations, professional associations and children's charities – a full list is available from: www.sustainweb.org/child_sup.asp

4. National School Meals Week 2005 'Get Wise to Food – It Matters' takes place 10th - 14th October, and is sponsored by the Local Authority Caterers Association (LACA), see: www.laca.co.uk/nsmw.asp

5. The Children's Food Bill Parliamentary launch will take place on Wednesday 12th October 2005 from 3.15pm – 5.15pm in the Jubilee Room in the House of Commons.

The launch takes place ahead of the Bill's Second Reading on Friday 28th October and will be attended by MPs and supporting organisations.

Speakers from 3.30pm are:

Mary Creagh MP

Sophie Grigson, Award winning food writer and broadcaster

Debbie Coulter, Deputy General Secretary, GMB Union

Caroline Seddon, Head of Science and Education, British Medical Association

Rodney Bickerstaffe, Past General Secretary, Unison

Christine Blower, Deputy General Secretary, National Union of Teachers

Journalists wishing to attend the launch are asked to contact Henry Gregg in Mary Creagh MP's office on 0207 219 6984 or 07980 298404.

The event is kindly funded by the GMB union and the British Medical Association.

6. The campaign for the Children's Food Bill is co-ordinated by Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming (www.sustainweb.org).

More information about the Children's Food Bill is available from: www.childrensfoodbill.org.uk and www.sustainweb.org/child_index.asp