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Mr Weir (HS4) ✓

Ref: BSEbaby

56

From: Dr H Pickles (SEB/B)

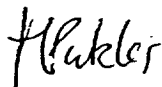
Date: 25 January 1989

cc: Dr Rubery*
Mr Cunningham*with copy of minute
to Mr Weir 20 December**BSE AND BABY FOOD**

I wrote to you in late December with my concern about bovine offal in baby food. You also saw that I was asking for a copy of a recent magazine article from the library. I have now received this, and send you a copy for your information.

Sir Richard Southwood's group meets again on the 3 February to finalise their report. It will then be presented to MAFF/DH Ministers in the expectation of being published, perhaps in mid to late February. Many of the conclusions will be relevant to you and I will keep you informed where I can.

About the only item it seems many remain to be decided next week is what if anything we say about offal in baby food. I enclose now in confidence the draft as it stands at present concerning this aspect. It might be that no action is recommended. On the other hand, the working party, persuaded by the animal evidence that immature animals are more susceptible to infection with the agents of spongiform encephalopathy, may make some recommendations either about labelling or about banning offal in baby food. Are there any comments you might have which are relevant to the working party decision?



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pharmaceutical manufacture but in the case of BSE it has to be accepted that infection could be present without clinical disease. The production processes are being examined to determine how these might be modified so as to destroy or remove infectious agents; the scrapie agent must now be included in such considerations.

5.3.4 Direct inoculation of bovine tissue could also occur accidentally in certain occupations, such as slaughtermen, veterinarians and laboratory workers. Guidance on safe working practices are drawn up by the Health and Safety Executive who have been alerted to the potential concern about BSE and in particular to the possible infectivity of placentae. No specific additional guidance on BSE is thought appropriate at this time. However adherence to recommended procedures in handling animals and animal products is clearly very important.

5.3.5 In these as in other circumstances the risk of transmission of BSE to humans appears remote. Nevertheless, because the possibility that BSE could be transmitted orally cannot be entirely ruled out, known affected cattle should not enter the human food chain and action now undertaken ensures this. There is no evidence that milk can transmit any of the spongiform encephalopathies. Nevertheless, to be consistent with the earlier recommendation that cattle known to be infected with BSE should not be offered for

human consumption, we have recommended that milk from cows suspected as having BSE should be destroyed. Action has also been taken here. Finally if the BSE agent were to be present in an animal it is most likely to be in the spleen and lymphatic tissues in the early stages of infection, and as the disease progresses in the brain and nervous tissue (Eklund et al '67, Dickinson & Outram '79, Kimberlin & Walker '88). It has been suggested that (Holt and Phillips '88), although clinically affected cattle are being slaughtered and destroyed, consideration should be given to products containing brain and spleen being so labelled, to enable the consumer to make an informed choice. The Working Party believes that risks as at present perceived would not justify this measure. We have been unable to obtain any detailed information on the ingredients of meat based baby foods, but we consider that manufacturers should avoid the use of offal.

- 5.3.6 It is a reasonable assumption that were BSE to be transmitted to humans, the clinical disorder would closely resemble CJD. Depending on the route of transmission, the incubation period could be as little as a year (as with some iatrogenic CJD cases) or several decades (as estimated for many natural CJD cases). Identification of any such cases as unusual or atypical would not be easy. However the Chief Medical Officer could consider whether specialist branches of the medical profession such as neurologists,

57

day, you soon realize that according to labeled protein content, a baby may have to eat four or five jars a day if it is relying on this as its main food intake. The figure for calories also indicates how thick the baby food is. One jar may contain 100 calories, but if you want to remove the baby's sugar, you would have to add water. Some baby foods, however, have a high water content, and babies love it. The added water, from their baby meals, they would have to increase the food's water content by as much as 25 per cent or more. Our own research shows that a baby's water content is 75 per cent. This means that a baby's water content is 75 per cent of its total weight. We have you to teach yourself to read labels and to find out in the meantime to improve the quality of baby food. (Designed for the parents of children.)

Children's Food, published by Brown Brothers, 198, Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10011. Available by mail order for \$4.75 (includes postage and handling charges). L.P.C. Publications, 38 Old Street, London EC1Y 1AR.

declaration (of the sort required on most other meat products) and it can help include of fat, brain, bowels, feet and testicles as well as mechanically reversed meat slices.

The nutritional data can tell you how dilute a product may be. For example, a typical six-month old baby needs at least 15 grams of protein a

WEANING FOOD READ THE SMALL PRINT

When buying food for a small child parents want to be sure they are getting something good for their children. But how can they judge the contents? Tim Lobstein, for *The Food Magazine*, looks at the labels on ready-to-serve weaning foods

granted anyway - while the small print provides only a few clues as to the real quality.

Water is often the major ingredient, and other ingredients will include thickening agents to mask the amount of water present. The amount and quality of the meats used can be questionable: there is no minimum meat

The average British baby eats 175-worth of ready-to-serve weaning food in its first year. A tin of baby food is being offered out of more of these jars and tins every day. Sales are worth nearly £50m to 62 top leading companies. From the market-leader, and Cow & Gate. They fight for market share and have led to a price war, with many parents on food quality reassured by authorities.

It is not easy to judge the quality of baby food. The labels, however, are not easy to judge the ingredients from the contents, as the food is labelled with its ingredients and its flavour boosters which mask the real ingredients.

The large print on the label tells you what the manufacturer is making. Customers who buy the product are of a better quality than they really are. The label is from making parents' questions. The large print boxes, the supposedly good features, many of which should be taken

NO ADDED SUGAR: Not should there be in a weaning product. In sweet ones there may well be non-sugar sweeteners like apple juice concentrates, allowing a sweet product to be sold as sugar-free.

NO ADDED SALT: No, but some sugar, flavour-boosting additives may well be present (see ingredient list). Watch out for salty ingredients like cheese and bacon, allowing salty food to be sold as 'no added salt'.

NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVOURINGS: Maybe not, but there could be some flavour-boosting ingredients that mask the added thickened water and the lack of food.

NO ADDED PRESERVATIVES: Some are banned from baby foods by law anyway. Add a vacuum-sealed jar or tin should need no additional preservative agent.

NO ARTIFICIAL COLOURING: These are banned in baby foods anyway. Watch out for foods being used primarily as colouring agents, like tomato puree and Vitamin E2 supplements.

NO ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS: These are banned in baby foods anyway.

NO FLAVOUR ENHANCERS: Technically, flavour enhancers are banned in baby foods by law anyway, but several ingredients provide added flavouring to mask the lack of real food (see the ingredients list).

Various age ranges are being offered, starting as young as the companies dare. Three months is the recommended earliest age to start weaning (up to as late as six months is fine).

Reassuring phrases about the 'pure ingredients', the 'careful preparation', of the product and its role as a 'nutritionally balanced diet'.

only best ingredients... selected and carefully... your baby's health... advice from our staff... feel reassured...

IDENTIFIERS, ARTIFICIALS, TO MAKE OUR FOODS MORE ATTRACTIVE, WE USE...

NO ADDED SUGAR
NO ADDED SALT

WATER: Often first in the list - is added in greater quantity than any other ingredient.

EGGS: No amount shown but probably below 10-15 per cent (not meat in this sort of meal. May heavily include many internal parts of an animal and mechanically recovered meat slurry).

CARROTS: In the USA, Hester says it checks for pesticide residues in vegetables. They make no such claim in the UK.

POTATO: Small quantities (5-10 per cent) in this is of little nutritional value, but it serves to thicken a watery mix.

APPLE JUICE: Useful as a sweetening agent, allowing the company to say 'no added sugar'.

MODIFIED CORNFLOUR: Little nutritional value, providing only empty calories (like sugar). Sole purpose is to thicken the watery mixture.

TOMATO PUREE: In such a small quantity (2.5 per cent) its main purpose is to add colour and a bit more thickening.

RICE FLOUR: Another thickener.

SOYA PROTEIN: Similar to Textured Vegetable Protein, a cheap substitute for meat, though lacking many of meat's vitamins and minerals.

HYDROLISED VEGETABLE PROTEIN: A close cousin of monosodium glutamate (but may be not permitted in baby foods), it gives a meaty flavour to the thickened mix, but has convincing the parent (obviously not the baby) that there is extra meat present.

DON SUPPLEMENT: An iron supplement that should not be needed if there were plenty of red meat in the product.

HEMES: Pushy to appeal to the taste buds of the adult, serves to give a 'beef-associated' flavour.

The nutritional analysis is given in a very brief form and may be of little use to most shoppers. It says nothing about the sugar levels, the salt levels or the saturated fat levels, nor the amount of water present. For a dedicated researcher they can give useful protein and calorie levels which could help evaluate meat and water content.

Sugar in a beef dinner? (See check for sweet ingredients like dried fruit, fruit puree or fruit pieces).

Salt - no, but check for salty ingredients like cheese or bacon, and check for the other forms of flavour booster which hide the lack of food and the excess thickened water.

Whether the quality of the beef is specified on this label, it has to be specified on other meat products - but baby foods are exempt for no obvious reason.

There could well be less than ten per cent lean meat in a tin like this, and this can include fat, grain, head, tongue and tail.

8

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