

Food labelling: UK gets a taste

New research shows that understanding and use of nutritional information on food is significantly higher in the UK than in other European countries, while controversy over variations in UK labelling practices continues.

The researchers watched supermarket shoppers in the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Hungary and Poland. 'We did this for selected product categories, where we knew that nutritional labels are usually or often present,' Professor Klaus Grunert, Director of the Centre for Research on Customer Relations in the Food Sector (MAPP) at Aarhus University in Denmark, told *People & Science*.

'We watched people at the shelf where these products were and recorded how much time they spent, whether they looked at the product in any detail before putting it into the trolley... When they had chosen at least one product from the particular shelf there, we asked... some questions.' Following the in-store interview, the shoppers were given a longer questionnaire including questions on understanding labelling systems.

There has been substantial debate over the merits of different labelling systems. Recently the Food Standards Agency announced that its voluntary front-of-pack food labelling scheme

would advocate showing levels of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt using three standard 'interpretive elements': per cent Guideline Daily Amount (%GDA), text (high/medium/low) and traffic light colours (red/amber/green).

Clare Boville of the UK Food Standards Agency told *People & Science*, 'Some businesses are only providing %GDA and we are very clear that %GDA on its own is not sufficient. So we're encouraging them to add to what they are already doing, on a voluntary basis. We see that very much as an interim step. We want to see businesses applying all three elements.'

However, Peter Vicary-Smith, Chief Executive of the campaigning consumer group *Which?* wants all businesses to use all three elements now. He says, 'When all the evidence shows that a single combined nutrition labelling scheme works best for consumers, it seems ludicrous to... [allow] companies to persist with their own different schemes.'

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'The UK leads on all the indicators [in our research],' says Grunert. 'I believe... controversy [in the UK] about traffic lights and GDA... has resulted in a lot more awareness and interest. It probably shows what can be done over a series of years when one puts this topic on the public agenda in a way that people also find interesting.'

Grunert notes, however, that use is lower than understanding. He says, 'Of course [making labels easy to understand] is important, but actually, maybe [it is] more important to think about ways to encourage consumers actually to use the information.'

Medical research Wellcome here

The Wellcome Trust has published a unique survey of the UK public's awareness of medical research. The first *Wellcome Trust Monitor* found strong support for it, but a majority of both adults and young people lacked a clear understanding of the scientific process. The survey will be repeated every three years.

<http://tinyurl.com/y8cbcha>

Reporting for the future

The Research Councils UK (RCUK) has published three reports setting out its public engagement strategy, highlighting the benefits of public engagement for researchers, and opportunities and support for researchers and schools to work together. The strategy aims to raise public confidence, inspire young people and increase the societal impact of research.

www.rcuk.ac.uk/per/bestprac.htm

Visiting stars

Keele University has refurbished its existing observatory to open the natural sciences to a wider audience. Visitors will be able to use equipment dating from the 19th century to the present day. Professor Nye Evans of Keele's astrophysics group said he hoped Keele Earth and Space Observatory will enhance the experience of youngsters and adults.

Voicing discovery

The British Library (BL) is recording 200 in-depth interviews with scientists and technicians to capture the culture of science in Britain since 1945. The project is partly funded by the Arcadia charitable foundation. 'We hope it will enthuse the next generation of scientists,' said Dr Rob Perks, Curator of Oral History at the BL.

www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/oralhist/oralhist.html

Climate science survey shock

A Science Museum poll on climate change has produced uncomfortable results for climate scientists.

Visitors to the *Prove it!* gallery and website last autumn were given information about the science of climate change and the UN conference in Copenhagen last December and asked to count themselves in or out to the statement: 'I want the UK Government to prove they're serious about tackling climate change by negotiating a strong, effective and fair deal at Copenhagen.'

Vicky Carroll, project leader at the Science Museum, gave *People & Science* the figures. Overall, 6,058 visitors counted in and 8,238 visitors counted out. The results were very different in the gallery and on the web: 3,408 gallery visitors counted in and 626 out, but online 2,650 counted in and 7,612 counted out.

'There's a risk of bias with online polls,' said Sarah Hards, author of a Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology briefing on *Climate Change: Engagement and Behaviour*.¹ 'I actually found it very hard to get conclusive data on whether people are really getting more concerned or more sceptical,' she continued.

Hards also looked at lessons for effective communication. 'It's about tailoring your approach to different groups. You can look at people's values and priorities, or at what they are currently doing to judge their level of involvement and what drivers and barriers are affecting them,' she says.

The 10:10 campaign² aims to persuade organisations and individuals to reduce their carbon footprint by 10 per cent in a period of twelve months starting in 2010. '10:10 deals in the realities of people's lives... in a timeframe I can think about, Eugenie Harvey, the Director of 10:10 UK, told *People & Science*. 'Most of us can't get our heads round making massive reductions of 80 per cent by 2050.'

The campaign is targeting new audiences. 'We have to pull on the levers of popular culture to meet people where they are, not where we think they should be,' Harvey says.

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The Science Museum, a founding signatory to 10:10, will open a major new £4million climate science gallery in the autumn. Carroll told *People & Science*: 'The most important thing we learnt [from *Prove it!*] is that... we need to directly engage and welcome all visitors, including those who are unconvinced about climate change, rather than focusing on the audiences who are already bought in... That's something we'll be taking forward in the new project.'

1 www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/postpn347.pdf

2 www.1010uk.org



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Science in poetry

A National Science and Engineering Week haiku-writing competition has been won by Paul Meehan from Intute with the triple entry:
Our blue/green marble//Tiny space rock, sustains life//We love planet Earth.

One small world, our home//Flora, fauna, so diverse//Celebrate its life!

Science Week here once more//Geeks and profs, all walks of life//Love our planet Earth

Joy in Myscience

A new science webzine for young people has been launched by the LUMA Centre, coordinated by the Faculty of Science of the University of Helsinki. It promotes the learning and joy of science, mathematics and technology at all levels. Young people worldwide can read and provide content for Myscience in English.

www.myscience.fi

RISC-Y business?

The public has been asked to help researchers record the distribution and ecology of six non-native species: Muntjac Deer, Chinese Mitten Crab, Zebra Mussel, Tree of Heaven, American Skunk Cabbage and Creeping Water Primrose. Email a photo to the Recording Invasive Species Counts project

(alert_nonnative@ceh.ac.uk) at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

www.nonnativespecies.org/recording

Fabulous Labulous

The UK's first Fab Lab has opened in Manchester to enable the public to bring their inventions to life. The first UK Fab Labbers have already made an ultra-light beach cricket bat and model wind turbines. They connected to other Labbers by a global video link network, enabling designs to be shared across cultures.

www.fablabmanchester.org