

'Crib sheet' – Martin Caraher

The following notes have been written to accompany Martin Caraher's presentation, because unless you attended one of the conferences, you may find the PDF difficult to follow.

Martin uses the images, excerpts etc as prompts for discussion. This is how you may choose to use the information or images provided.

However, here follows a rough outline of some of the issues discussed in Martin's energetic and inspiring presentation.

Fat and poor/Poor and thin

Obesity levels have been charted over the past 30 years. Greece and Albania top the obesity charts. This correlates with poverty. Basically, the poorer you are, the more likely you are to be eating poor quality food and to be overweight. This is reflected in obesity levels being lower in Northern Europe and higher in Southern Europe, in line with levels of inequality in terms of wealth.

Of course, where there is extreme poverty and a lack of access to food, you will find malnutrition. (See contrasting photographs on page 21)

Food Wars

A new battleground has emerged around the politics of health = Food Wars (see page 2)

Three paradigms exist:

Productionist Paradigm = agriculture + processing + distribution at centre of production (i.e. produce more = sell more = make more money) (page 3)

Life Sciences Paradigm = genetics + individual health at centre of production (page 4)

Ecologically Integrated Paradigm = Humans + Environment at centre of production (page 4)

Different ways in which you can intervene to affect positive impacts on health. (See page 5 – Determinants of Health diagram)

You can intervene at an individual level e.g. looking at lifestyle factors/psychology

OR

Change the social/community environment.

Food Culture

One of the difficulties is that the UK doesn't have a coherent food culture, unlike France and Italy for example. See page 14 and 15 for UK self-sufficiency levels pre 1750 – 2006.

The graph on page 17 shows self-sufficiency levels for France and Italy have remained high and fairly constant from 1963 – 2003. In other words, they produce enough produce to support themselves, and invest in this.

In Italy, all food in schools is locally produced and organic. This isn't purely based on a policy decision; it's as much by chance.

In France, legislation exists to say that retailers have to buy from regional wholesalers. This protects local producers.

Making decisions for people

Actually making decisions for people might be seen as an unpopular move, but this can make an individual's choices easier. For example, to avoid over-consumption of chocolate, simply make the chocolate bar smaller.

This concept fits with choice architecture or the 'Nudge' theory and relates to the Puska diagram (pages 5, 7, 32).

The examples Martin gave to illustrate this concept are the small changes you can make to a school cafeteria to increase healthy eating choices, such as:

- Simply making a verbal offer of salad to accompany the meal can result in a 60% rise in uptake.
- Moving the salad bar away from the wall increases uptake by 30%
- Serving fruit in wooden or bamboo bowls rather than stainless steel (this has been found to be off-putting)
- Offering a healthy options express lane (kids apparently hate queuing)

Poor pay more

Poorer families spend more of their income on food (25%) compared with the average (10-12%). School holidays place an extra burden.

This can lead to a greater dependence on fast food outlets. Cheap meal deals make it a more affordable option (see page 11 and 23). In these cases, mealtimes are not joyful but are simply intended to fill kids up. It also means parents can ensure the food is eaten rather than going to waste.

It is noticeable that middle-class families tend to eat out less.

Against this background, food prices are expected to rise by 25%.

Biological preferences

Humans are naturally predisposed to seek out sugar; water and fat for survival (see pages 18 and 19). However, how we get these things have changed. Fast food, junk food, artificial sweeteners and difficulties in accessing fresh food have added to the obesity problem.

Meals on Wheels

See page 8. Here you have a ridiculous situation where locally produced food is sent thousands of miles to be processed, and then returned to the country of origin. As Martin says you literally have parts of chickens crossing the road at the same time!

Roads are actually acting in many cases like storage facilities and this helps to keep down supermarkets' costs.

The UK imports 61,400 tonnes of poultry and exports 33,100 tonnes.

The UK also imports 430,000 tonnes of apples. Vast areas of orchards have been taken up to make way for other farming and land use. The Scottish Government is committed to investing more in local fruit production.

N.B. McDonalds have bought the entire UK crop of apples for the 2012 London Olympics.

What is 'sustainable'?

The Food Poverty, Fact or Fiction report looks at food issues affecting consumers in Northern Ireland and explores topics such as local and seasonal food choices e.g. food miles, climate change and food quality

http://www.safefood.eu/PageFiles/2788/PHA2007_FoodPovertyFactorFiction.pdf?epslanguage=en

Who's the greenest of them all?

McDonalds is actually the greenest company in the UK in that they only use local beef and other local produce, and can name their sources.

9 meals from anarchy

Supermarkets' reliance on diesel trucks for 'Just in time delivery' and 'warehousing on wheels'; and their transportation of processed foods and raw materials around the world means that during the fuel protests of September 2000, Justin King, the CEO of Sainsbury, warned Blair that we would be 'out of food' within 'days not weeks' if the protests continued.

For more information:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/11/nine-meals-anarchy-sustainable-system>

Power Issues

See 'The Food Supply Chain Bottleneck' diagram on page 12.

This shows the disproportionate amount of power held by supermarket buying desks. As they more or less control the market, they can say to a farmer

"I'll take your crop of carrots for £X"

The following year, they might say

"I'll take your full crop of carrots at £X but you'll need to supply them prewashed"

The following year, they might say

"I'll be paying less for this year's crop, if you don't like it tough, who else is going to buy them off you?"

This puts the squeeze on farmers and it also limits the choice that consumer have of where their produce is sourced from and how ethically the suppliers have been treated. In addition, when you see discounted produce, you can rest assured that it will be the farmer, not the supermarket that has taken the hit.

Who makes the money?

90 per cent of food trade is controlled by 20 transnational companies (TNCs). See page 25.

If you use coffee as an example, the grower in Africa receives a fraction of the money made by the supermarket that sells the final product.

See page 26-27

Activities:

Explore, compare and discuss the "rules" provided in the two handouts:

- 18 cultural rules for ecological public health eating by Tim Lang; and
- Eat food. Not much. Mostly plants by Michael Pollan

N.B. A criticism of both sets of "rules" is that they centre on the individual, but society and governments have a part to play.

Challenge:

What role can Home Economics play in all this?

- It can prepare students with respect to the wider issues of the global food system and their place in it.
- It can challenge the system and make people aware of the power of TNCs/large companies