

Government is 'taking the biscuit' says SA

A SOIL Association (SA) investigation has revealed that the NHS Food Scanner app has been recommending ultra-processed junk food to families despite its link to life-threatening health risks.

The SA says the app – marketed as a tool to help consumers make healthier choices – has been describing biscuits, fizzy drinks, instant noodles, cakes, chocolate puddings and crisps as 'good choices' for a healthy diet, often marking energy drinks with a 'High-Five' status.

The Government's 'poor advice' is 'near criminal', says the SA, and only benefits 'the food corporations profiting from these junk foods'.

When the SA tested the app – which has been downloaded more than half a million times – it found that 80% of sample products bearing the 'Good Choice' badge or similar endorsed ultra-processed foods which are linked to life-shortening health issues.

The organization has launched a petition urging



Government to stop promoting unhealthy foods as healthy options. Cathy Cliff, campaign coordinator, is calling for 'true leadership' and updated public dietary advice: "We are shocked to see the Government not only ignoring the health risks around ultra-processed foods but actively encouraging families to consume them ... When every penny counts, it is near criminal that families are being misled to waste money on junk food that doesn't fill you up with anything other than health risks."

"The Government is taking the biscuit. We are calling for them to cut the crap – stop telling families that ultra-processed is a good choice and show true leadership by helping us all to eat better."

Healthy wholefoods take centre stage at Natural Food Show

RETURNING to ExCeL on 16-17 April as part of Natural & Organic Products Europe (NOPEX), this year's Natural Food Show will centre around the importance of healthy wholefoods and the environmental effects of our food systems.

For 27 years the Natural Food Show has championed food and drink innovations spanning organic, free-from, vegetarian, vegan, biodynamic and sustainable. Now, with consumers giving greater consideration to the health of themselves and the planet, show organizer Diversified Communications says the time is right to reiterate the importance of wholefood ingredients, and to highlight the impact our food systems have on the natural world.

The show will be complemented by a full seminar

programme, including a session with Craig Sams, executive chairman of Carbon Gold, who will cover how carbon taxes will make non-organic food more expensive and organic food cheaper, and how they will reduce greenhouse gas levels, increase biodiversity and lead to cleaner air and waters – among myriad other benefits. Mike Watkins, head of retailer and business insight, NielsenIQ, will present a session on *The Changing Climate of Sustainability*, while the Soil Association will outline how the organic movement has changed the UK food scene and explain why backing organic can ensure that a business is part of the solution to problems within our food system.

In addition to 'uniting the natural and organic world',

HFMA Bulletin

Aileen Green, global head, regulatory and scientific affairs, ADM Protexin



The microbiome-gut-brain axis

In recent years, observers have commented on the rising burden of mental health concerns across the world. Indeed, conversations about mental health seem to be far more part of regular discourse today. According to Mind, one in four people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England, and one in six report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety) in any given week.

Increasingly, academic research groups around the world are looking at how food supplements and nutritional interventions might impact mental wellbeing. Nutritional psychiatry is an emerging field that looks at the effect our diet can have on mental health, with particular interest in the role of gastrointestinal microbiome.

The microbiome-gut-brain axis describes the two-way communication that happens between the bacteria (and other microorganisms) in the gut and the brain. This communication occurs through three main pathways: the nervous system, the immune system and the endocrine (or hormonal) system.

Academics around the world are seeking to understand how the gut might have an effect on the physiology of the brain. Current areas of research include understanding how different groups of microorganisms in the gut might affect the levels of mood-regulating neurotransmitters, such as serotonin (the happy hormone) and GABA. The microbiome has also been shown to have an effect on the cortisol-hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, which is important in our bodies' stress response.

Currently, most research into the microbiome-gut-brain axis consists of small, exploratory human trials and pre-clinical models. In 2019 a group of academics produced a review of the current published data, examining the results from 23 different human clinical trials investigating the effect of live microbial and fibre supplementation in individuals with mood disorders. Overall, the review found a significant improvement in depressive symptoms in those individuals taking live microbial supplements.

In 2022, researchers at the University of Oxford completed a clinical trial using an orally administered live microbial supplement to examine changes in psychological processing and measurements of low mood. The study explored the effects of daily intake by volunteers (n = 71), in a four-week randomized double-blind placebo-controlled study. The researchers observed some intriguing results from a variety of validated questionnaires, emotional and cognitive tests and analysis of salivary cortisol and serum C-reactive protein. The study demonstrated that the multispecies live microbial supplement altered aspects of emotional processing and reward learning, with improvements noted in mood scores measured by the PHQ-9 questionnaire.

In the coming years a number of new clinical trials related to microbiome-gut-brain axis will be published. This will provide invaluable new data on how the microorganisms of the gut might be affecting outcomes relevant for mental health and will provide consumers with a new range of product choices for mental wellbeing.

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The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) is the voice of the natural health industry. For further information, advice or details about membership, visit www.hfma.co.uk

the Natural Food Show is described by Diversified as 'the central place to discover a wide range of trend-setting functional foods all under one roof' – many of which can be found in the country pavilions, Vegan World, the Innovation Zone and the new Launchpad Zone which champions 'cutting edge' start-ups. A raft of NPD from over 700 exhibiting companies will be on show for retailers to sample, including launches from big name brands such

as Suma Wholefoods, Doves Farm, Raw Living, Brand Organic, Biogroupe, NKD Living and Nutland.

Trade registration is now open; to secure your place at the show visit www.naturalproducts.co.uk

