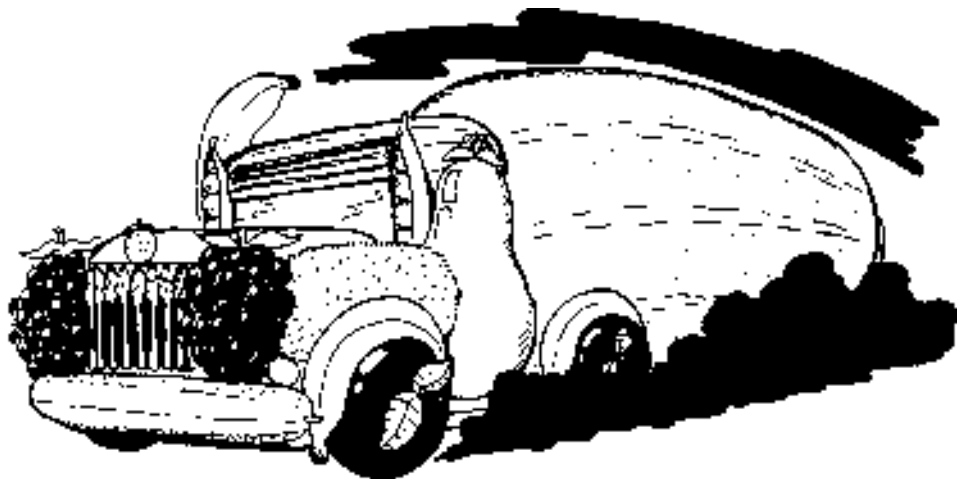


Food miles - Still on the road to ruin?

An assessment of the debate over the unnecessary transport of food, five years on from the food miles report.



Food miles - Still on the road to ruin?

**An assessment of the debate over the
unnecessary transport of food, five years on
from the food miles report**



Food Miles: still on the road to ruin?

Contents

Introduction	2
Why run a Food Miles Campaign?	3
Some Food Miles facts	4
Misery miles	4
Is our food still travelling further?	6
The effect of more Food Miles	7
Transport pollution	7
More packaging	7
More processing	8
Biodiversity loss	8
Agro-chemical use	8
Nutritional implications	8
Implications for producers	9
The implications for developing countries	1
Campaign update and the industry and government response	11
Checking out the supermarkets	11
Local alternatives	13
Direct retailing	13
Regional focus groups	13
Growing your own	13
Recommendations for action	15
Action by individuals	15
Action by farmers and growers	15
Action by food retailers and processors	15
Action by local authorities	16
Action by national governments	16
Contact List	17
Box schemes and farmers' markets	17
Seeds and advice on growing your own fruit and vegetables	17
Transport campaigns	17
Fair Trade and developing country initiatives	17
Farm shops	17
Major retailers	17
Regional promotions	17
References	18

Contributions by: Vicki Hird, Chris Emerson, Emma Noble, Jeanette Longfield, Victoria Williams, Dominic Goetz, Rosemary Hoskins, Angela Paxton, Gavin Dupee
The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the members of Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

October 1999

© Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming
Sustain, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF
Tel: 020 7837 1228 Fax: 020 7837 1141
Email: sustain@sustainweb.org Website: www.sustainweb.org

Introduction

In 1994 the SAFE Alliance¹ launched the Food Miles Report which, for the first time, comprehensively illustrated the environmental and social implications of the rapid escalation in the distance that our food was travelling, 'from the plough to the plate'. It was widely reported on and created a whole spectrum of responses and actions by industry, government and the public. During the past 5 years the SAFE Alliance has continued to publicise the issue and give the public the opportunity to learn about what they can do to combat Food Miles (see A history of the Food Miles campaign below).

Five years on, with the notion of Food Miles established in the minds of consumers, producers and retailers, this reports sets out to show whether the Food Miles situation has changed: what problems remain; how the campaign has developed; how the supermarkets have reacted; what local initiatives now exist; and where people can turn for further information and support. It draws heavily on both new research but also on the Food Facts series of reports being published by the SAFE Alliance (now called Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming). Please refer to the original *Food Miles Report*² for more detailed analysis of the issues central to the Food Miles debate.

A history of the Food Miles campaign

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| October 1994 | ➔ Launch of the <i>Food Miles Report</i> with wide coverage and public debate |
| April 1995 | ➔ 1 year Consumer Information Project part funded by Department of the Environment |
| June 1995 | ➔ Distribution of 25,000 Food Miles consumer surveys |
| September 1995 | ➔ Food Mile Information Booklet published |
| December 1995 | ➔ Launch of <i>A Feast too Far: a survey of shopper concerns about Food Miles</i> |
| April 1996 | ➔ <i>Action on Food Miles: strategies for local food economy</i> event to launch new <i>Food Miles Action Pack</i> for local groups, schools and local authorities |
| June 1996 | ➔ Start of 6 country campaign on sustainable menus |
| 1996/7 | ➔ Launch of first <i>Food Facts</i> on strawberries, potatoes and bread covering Food Miles issues |
| 1998/9 | ➔ Launch of DETR funded <i>Food Facts</i> materials including research reports and leaflets on beef, milk, apples, pears, carrots, soya, beer, lettuce, chicken meat, vegetable oil and oranges. |
| October 1999 | ➔ Launch of five year Food Miles update by Sustain (formerly SAFE Alliance and NFA) |

Why run a Food Miles Campaign?

It is an unfortunate consequence of our current food industry that Food Miles are on the increase. Food production, distribution and consumption patterns have undergone a major transformation over the past 50 years. Retailers have continued to develop ever more extensive and sophisticated outlets and distribution systems and import an increasing volume of produce. Consumers have become used to convenient, comfortable shopping facilities, and a large range of quality produce.

In the UK the five largest retail chains account for 80 per cent of the market³, and their marketing decisions have a massive effect on the producers, other retailers and the environment. The supermarkets exert a virtual monopoly over many towns and villages, so many consumers have little choice but to shop at the major multiples. The supermarkets' drive for efficiency, their central distribution systems, overseas sourcing and the expansion of their retail area incur costs to the environment and society which are not accounted for.⁴ With the buying up of one of the UK's largest, Asda, by the world's biggest superstore, Wal-Mart in 1999, it is possible that even more lengthy distribution chains will result as the company rationalises its operations and imports more from the US.

At a European level, there has been a huge push for an expanded road network which has been supported by major international and European food companies. As a result, plans by the European Commission for the Trans-European Network (TEN) will cost up to \$580 billion over 15 years.⁵ This will result in more and bigger roads, which will facilitate the expansion of multiple retailer dominance over smaller independent operations. The large-scale retailers - with lower prices that are partially the product of hidden transport subsidies - will draw customers from ever further away and dependence on the car will grow. The expansion of the European Union into Eastern and Central Europe will further increase food miles. The European Commission's own impact assessment suggests that the planned doubling of the motorway system alone is expected to lead to the demise of 1,000 small villages throughout Europe.

Globally, the trend towards trade liberalisation has increasingly included food. Prior to the 1970s, the conventional wisdom was that food production was an important domestic objective, which should lie outside trade disciplines and negotiations. More recently agriculture and food products became viewed like any other commodity and now issues surrounding trade in these goods are firmly on the agenda for world trade negotiations. Many groups concerned with third world food security and stability are calling for food security, equity and food standards to be given far more prominence in the discussions. There are very real concerns that greater food trade actually harms the poorer populations and puts power into the hands of ever fewer, more powerful and unaccountable corporations.

The last few years have seen increasing dissatisfaction with: food quality, safety, increasing prices, the lack of consumer choice and an alarming inequality in food distribution. Consumers have begun to question the way in which their food is produced and why it is being transported unnecessary miles within the UK, to the UK, and out of the UK.

Some Food Miles facts

Trade and transport

- The UK is a net importer of food and in 1998 had a trade gap in food, feed and drink of £7.9 billion - a worse situation than 1994 when it was £5.8 billion.⁶
- The UK's degree of self-sufficiency has deteriorated over recent years (see Table 1) so we are more reliant on overseas producers.
- The UK producers' share of the UK vegetable market decreased by 3 per cent in just 5 years (from 81 per cent in 1991 to 79 per cent in 1996). UK fruit growers have lost over 5 per cent (dropping from an already low 19 per cent in 1991 to 13.8 per cent).⁷

Far flung foods

- In 1996 the UK imported 434,000 tonnes of apples, 202,000 tonnes of which came from outside the EU. Over 60 per cent of UK apple orchards have been lost since 1970.⁸
- In 1997 the UK imported 105,000 tonnes of pears, 72,000 tonnes of which were from outside the EU. Nearly 50 per cent of UK pear orchards have been lost since 1970.⁹
- In 1996 the UK imported 233,000 tonnes of beef, 80,000 tonnes of which were from outside the EU.¹⁰ The beef came from as far away as Namibia (9,500km) and Australia (21,000km)
- In 1997 we *imported* 126 million litres of liquid milk into the UK and *exported* 270 million litres of milk out of the UK. We *imported* 23,000 tonnes of milk powder in to the UK and *exported* 153,000 tonnes out of the UK, 135,000 tonnes of which went outside the EU. We *imported* 115,000 tonnes of butter, 51,000 tonnes of which was from outside the EU, and *exported* 67,000 tonnes of butter, 27,000 tonnes of which was exported outside the EU.¹¹

Misery miles

- Rules governing meat hygiene have resulted in the closure of a thousand UK abattoirs in the last 10 years - and many of these look set to close with new more expensive inspection costs.¹² This has resulted in an increase in the distance that live animals have to travel prior to slaughter, generating contamination problems, Food Miles and causing the animals distress.
- Live sheep are exported hundreds of miles from the UK suffering during the journey and at the southern European abattoirs, many of which use cruel slaughter methods.¹³
- Over 2 million tonnes of soya were imported into the UK for animal feed and as a food additive. There are considerable problems associated with this including the loss of rainforests and soil erosion in Brazil when soya is cultivated. Much of the US soya crop is now genetically engineered and this brings a range of potential problems such as increased weed-killer use, genetic pollution, spread of weedy plants and loss of choice for consumers who wish to buy non-GM foods.¹⁴

Table 1: UK Self sufficiency as per cent of total consumption¹⁵

Self sufficiency...	...in all foods %	...in indigenous type food (food that could be grown in the UK) %
1993	73.4	85.3
1994	73.0	85.8
1995	73.5	86.5
1996	69.8	83.1
1997	68.7	82.0
1998	68.1	82.3

Food Miles stories

Over the years of the SAFE Alliance campaign, examples of excessive Food Miles have come to the office. It is not always possible to find commercial confirmation of these instances (farmers are often understandably reluctant to give their name for fear of being black-listed, and the supermarkets always refuse to give details) and the situation changes from day to day. So this information is often difficult to reference. The following are a few examples we heard about during the years:

- Whisky sent from Scotland to Southampton to be packaged.¹⁶
- Lincolnshire potatoes sent to Bristol to be washed.¹⁷
- Fish from Aberdeen sent to Cornwall to be smoked.¹⁸
- Sprouts transported from Kent to Scotland to be processed.¹⁹

Green apples and strawberry yoghurt potty!

A researcher looking at all the different ways in which apples can be transported has shown that the fuel energy needed to deliver a kilogram of dessert apples from suppliers (overseas and UK) to a consumer in Denbigh, Yorkshire can be up to 17.75 mega Joules (MJ). Calculating the amount of energy needed to produce and transport the apples and the energy the apples actually provide showed that the transport energy can be up to 35 times greater than the energy provided by the apple.²⁰

A lot of our yoghurt is imported, some of it from Germany. This is bad enough in terms of Food Miles, but even before the yoghurt has left the factory it has already clocked up a significant mileage. The milk for the yoghurt might have been local, but the strawberries may be imported from Poland, and processed in northern Germany before being transported to the factory in the South. Yoghurt cultures are also transported from the North of Germany, and sugar beet from the East. Corn and wheat flour came from the Netherlands and the labels and aluminium covers travel over 300km. All together the ingredients and 'components' may have travelled over 1,000km before they even left for the UK.

Is our food still travelling further?

In the last two decades (1978-1998) the amount of food being transported on UK roads has increased by 20 per cent, but the average distance travelled has increased by 50 per cent. A tonne of food travels an average distance of 123 km now compared to 82 km in 1978.*

In 1993 the total Food Miles for UK food, drink and tobacco products amounted to 36 billion tonne-km (T-Km - a calculation of total food travelled by total distance). By 1998 the total Food Miles was 42.5 billion tonne-kilometres - an 18 per cent increase in just 5 years. Food accounts for the largest amount of freight above any other single commodity and the largest increase in road freight over the last two decades - 34 per cent of the increase in goods travelled is made up of food. Interestingly, the majority of the increase in transported foods has been in foodstuffs i.e. processed foods (increased by 8.6 billion T-Km) rather than the agricultural products (increased by 2.2bn T-Km).

So the same amount of foodstuffs are being hauled over longer distances and the main beneficiaries are the intermediaries such as the freight companies, the major food manufacturers and retailers. The food filling the roads is also more processed than ever before. The costs to society are rarely accounted for.

Table 2: Tonnage and distance travelled by food 1978-98 in the UK²¹

	Quantity (millions of tonnes)	Average distance (km)
1978	287	82
1983	264	89
1988	302	100
1993	300	119
1998	346	123

* As official statistics use kilometres we have not converted these into miles. For reference 1km = 0.6214 miles.

The effect of more Food Miles

Transport pollution

Between 1978 and 1998 the distance that food was transported, in the UK, increased by 50 per cent (see Table 2 above). Since the *Food Miles Report* was published in October 1994 some companies have introduced policies to reduce their fuel use (see later) but the situation has not improved overall.

- Transport in all forms is a major consumer of energy. In 1996, some 34 per cent of all UK energy consumption was used by transport. As a result, transport is also a major contributor to pollutant emissions. Of the total UK emissions of various pollutants, transport accounts for 26 per cent of carbon dioxide, 61 per cent of nitrous oxides, 91 per cent of carbon monoxide, 42 per cent of volatile organic compounds and 59 per cent of black smoke.²²
- 19 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions come from road transport, 83 per cent carbon monoxide emissions come from petroleum.²³
- The Government now accepts that up to 24,000 people die prematurely every year as a result of exposure to air pollution²⁴ and the health impact of traffic pollution cost £11.1 billion annually²⁵
- It has been estimated that traffic congestion costs UK industry around £15-20 billion each year.²⁶
- Rail freight, a less polluting freight option, accounted for only 13 per cent of all freight in 1996, and food accounted for only 4.3 per cent of this.²⁷
- Air freight is expected to double in the next 20 years. Air freight causes very high levels of pollution - a 2 minute DC10 take off is equal to the air pollution levels (nitrogen oxides) of driving 21,539 cars one mile at 30 miles an hour.²⁸

The need to reduce air pollution has not diminished, in fact the United Nations Framework Convention, agreed at Kyoto in 1998, set targets for the levels of pollution reduction that all nations should aim for. Although negotiations left the treaty language less than clear, it is generally accepted that the OECD and transition countries should, at a minimum, seek to return by 2000 to the greenhouse gas emission levels they had in 1990. If the UK is to meet this target all pollution-generating activities need to be controlled. As the table below shows, every Food Mile counts.

Table 3: Energy use of different forms of transport²⁹

	Energy consumed (kilojoules per T-Km)	Emissions of carbon dioxide (g T-Km)	Emissions of hydro-carbons(g/ T-Km)	Emissions of nitrogen oxides (g T-Km)	Emissions of carbon monoxide (g T-Km)
Rail	677	41	0.06	0.2	0.05
Boat	423	30	0.04	0.4	0.12
Road	2,890	207	0.30	3.6	2.40
Air	15,839	1,206	2.00	5.5	1.40

T-Km = Tonne kilometres of goods transported

g/ T-Km = grams per tonne-kilometre

More packaging

Food that is to be transported long distances often needs greater degrees of packaging to retain product quality. From the retailers' perspective, this needs to be disposed of as cheaply as possible and can result in waste and pollution. In the UK, an average of 137kg of packaging was used per person in 1995. 25 million tonnes of waste was produced in 1997 in the UK and a third of this was food packaging.³⁰

More processing

Processed food incurs greater Food Miles than fresh produce, because of the additional transportation of ingredients (and packaging) required prior to distribution to retail outlets. Fortunately, UK consumers are eating more fresh fruit and vegetables (see Table 4 below), but they and the retailers need to source these as locally as possible.

Table 4: UK food consumption data (grams per person per week)³¹

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Fresh green vegetables	240	245	225	233	251
Other fresh vegetables	477	464	470	489	497
Processed vegetables	562	561	563	591	568
Total vegetables	2154	2082	2061	2118	2061
Fresh fruit	617	645	672	686	712

Biodiversity loss

Most major multiple retailers seek efficiency through economies of scale. This can mean that they encourage their suppliers to produce a very limited range of varieties of crops in order to simplify their packaging and distribution operations. This can reduce traditional regional diversity and result in a loss of agricultural biodiversity. The box below on 'Selective strawberries and restricted potatoes' shows how the need for uniform and transportable varieties has eroded the diversity of foods grown.

Agro-chemical use

The long distance transportation of food can result in greater use of agri-chemicals in several ways. Chemicals are used to protect the crops in transit or storage. Unlike chemicals used while the fruit is being grown, these post harvest chemicals are intended to stay on the fruit. Eighty five per cent of Cox's apples are treated with chemical dip or drench prior to storage. The Department of Health recommends peeling orchard fruit to help avoid pesticide residues being eaten by children.³²

Growing the same variety in one place to provide large volumes to supermarkets means more disease and pest problems which can lead to greater chemical requirements. Cox's apples, grown in large modern orchards receive an average of 16 pesticide sprays. Around three-quarters of UK strawberries grown are of a variety called *Elsanta* which doesn't have a special flavour, but is preferred by supermarkets because it retains its appearance and can be stored and transported longer distances. However, because *Elsanta* is particularly susceptible to the disease *Verticillium*³³, growers use 160 tonnes of the chemical *methyl bromide*, which causes ozone depletion, every year in UK strawberry production. Methyl bromide is being phased out, albeit slowly, on an international level, as it destroys the ozone layer.

Nutritional implications

There is evidence that varieties of crops which have been sidelined in the pressure to increase productivity and suitability for supermarket transport and display are able to provide better nutritional value. There are several varieties of apples with the vitamin C content double, and in some cases treble that of the widespread heavy-cropping Golden Delicious that dominates the market with over 50 per cent of the sales.³⁴ There are nutritional implications too of storing and transporting fresh produce. The vitamin C content drops rapidly after fruit is picked for instance. So the closer the consumer can be to the grower, the better, as produce should be stored and transported less.

Selective strawberries and restricted potatoes

A 1997 SAFE Alliance report, *How Green Are Our Strawberries?*, showed that the supermarkets' demand for perfect **strawberries** all year round is bad news both for UK strawberry growers, for the environment, and for shoppers. UK strawberries are losing out to imports - official figures showed that home grown strawberries' share of the total market fell from 70 per cent in 1985 to 51 per cent in 1995. During the 1995 UK strawberry season, over 1,000 tonnes of Californian strawberries were flown in to the UK whilst over 12,000 tonnes of Spanish strawberries were imported during the summer months.

The investigation revealed the costs for the environment from: the long-distant transport of strawberries, intensive use of pesticides, use of ozone depleting chemicals, genetic engineering and the loss of strawberry varieties. It also revealed that supermarkets' demands for fruit which can survive long journey times and extended shelf life meant reduced consumer choice in terms of taste and greater chemical use. One variety, Elsanta, makes up 75 per cent of strawberries sold due to its long shelf life and good travelling characteristics. It is, however, not resistant to diseases such as powdery mildew. Recent official testing found pesticide residues in 88 per cent of both imported and UK strawberries.³⁵

Only five per cent of the **potato** varieties that will grow in the UK are grown commercially. This is partly because the processors will only select from a couple of varieties that they consider most suitable to their needs, whether it be for chips, crisps or other processing use. Storage is another factor strongly favoured. Breeders now breed potato varieties 'for the processors and supermarkets' rather than the growers.³⁶ It is currently up to amateur gardeners and the renowned HDRA (see Contacts) to help preserve the tremendous diversity of potatoes for future posterity.³⁷

Implications for producers

UK farmers are facing a crisis at present with incomes cut by almost 50 per cent in 1998 and the value of food produced at an all time low. 60 per cent of respondents to an NFU survey reported having to make redundancies whilst the average age of farmers increases.³⁸ Several factors are responsible including a strong pound, the beef export ban (now being lifted) and a lack of power in the market place. Supermarket prices are not lower but farmers are getting an ever smaller proportion of the price paid by the consumer.

One recent protest showed the levels of frustration - a farmer's placard read '*Supermarket cartel: for this lamb farmers are paid £28 today - housewives pay £128 tomorrow*'.³⁹ The price farmers get for a litre of milk has dropped significantly but the price in the shops has changed little. One farmer had his three year bullock traced for profit margins when he lost £32 on the sale in 1998. Between the stages of abattoir and retail sale a margin of over £800 was made on the animal.⁴⁰ Thus profit built up with Food Miles. Farmers are resorting to monitoring labels in the supermarkets to check that consumers are being told honestly whether produce is British or not. Imports are replacing home grown supplies and in many cases causing increased Food Miles. The costs of the transport clearly do not outweigh the savings made with cheaper imports.

A current investigation by the Competition Commission has been instigated by concerns that the supermarkets are making excessive profits and are using anti-competitive strategies. Sustain argues in its submission to the enquiry that the hidden costs of the mass transportation of foods are not being met by the food industry and that this is giving them an unfair advantage over local independent suppliers. An indication that growers are beginning to get fed up with their low profits and lack of power is the huge interest in Farmers' Markets. A recent survey by the NFU indicated that 98 per cent of farmers believe their future would be more secure if they 'went back to basics and selling direct to the public'. 41 per cent of respondents to the survey reckoned the main advantage of farmers' markets would be face to face contact with the public.⁴¹

The implications for developing countries

The initial *Food Miles Report* did cause concern in some quarters that SAFE was attacking all international trade and potentially challenging the livelihoods of developing-country farmers. This was never the intention. Our principle target is the unnecessary transportation of food, and that can just as easily occur with food produced and consumed in this country as it can in international trade. The many political and economic obstacles in the way of developing countries developing better food security and higher standards of living were discussed in the *Report*. We would, however, add that not all international trade can be justified on the basis of supporting developing-country farmers, farm workers or the majority of the populations in developing countries.

The way in which food is increasingly traded increases the possibility that producers or the environment, or both, are being exploited by multinational companies involved in processing and retailing. Many examples in the original report and information provided by groups since showed that the farmers, workers and populations in poorer countries were not always benefiting from increased trade in non- traditional products. Labour conditions, pay, health and safety, environmental protection and conservation were being compromised in many cases. This was illustrated by a Christian Aid report into the '*Global Supermarket*'.⁴²

There is a clear need for a move towards a set of standards for ethical trade. At the moment the best guarantee for UK consumers is the Fair Trade symbol (see contacts section for further information). The publication of the Food Miles report stimulated major discussions within the development sector and several new initiatives have been generated such as the Ethical Trading Initiative - a collaboration between the retailers, the Government and development groups to develop better standards for overseas trading partners.

Sustain fully supports the work of a number of UK based NGOs in developing 'Fair Trade' which ensures that the farmers receive a fair price for their produce, and Sustain acknowledges the tremendous benefit that this represents for developing-country farmers.

Campaign update and the industry and government response

At the time of SAFE Alliance's initial *Food Miles Report* in 1994 the supermarkets paid little attention to the question of Food Miles. Not one had a policy position on this area.

The SAFE Alliance followed up with the *Food Miles Action Pack*⁴³ for individuals, groups and local authorities, a consumer survey, and Food Facts reports and leaflets giving the details of food miles of specific food items such as strawberries, milk and soya.⁴⁴ Other **NGOs**, like the Women's Environmental Network with its 'Breathe Easy: Buy Local' Campaign, the Soil Association's 'Local Food Links' projects, and Friends of the Earth's transport campaigns have further highlighted the problems. Ironically 5 years on from our seasonality charts helping consumers to buy seasonally, the National Farmers Union representing a majority of the UK farming community has produced charts to help British shoppers become more aware of when their favourite foods are at their freshest.⁴⁵ Other independent farmer groups have devised a way of showing the 'pollution factor' of long distance foods incorporating whether it has come by air, road or ship.⁴⁶

The **Government** has made some moves recently to force industry to reduce fuel use with increased fuel taxes and duties for road freight and an integrated transport policy which places emphasis on improving public transport and reducing freight. It has created a new high level group concerned with the food chain. Unfortunately its membership is confined to big business groups, the NFU and MAFF officials. There is no representation from those concerned with the environment, local economies or consumer interests.⁴⁷

Now, nearly all the major multiple **retailers** have a position statement on the issue and several have changed their practices, largely because of the work of SAFE and the subsequent concerns expressed by the public (see 'Checking out the supermarkets' below). Environmental reports give details of their efforts to reduce Food Miles and get more of their freight onto trains. Small scale pilot initiatives where local food is sold (either by the retailer or by local farmers) have indicated a strong consumer demand for locally delivered produce.

Despite these initiatives, the figures for the distance that our food travels are getting worse (see Table 2). Food is filling the roads so if we are to get more action rather than rhetoric, consumer pressure on the retailers needs to be maintained. But why target them?

The five major retailers now have a virtual monopoly on the food market, selling 80 per cent of food in the UK, and the number of specialised retailers has fallen to less than 12,000.⁴⁸ The multiples have made it clear that they want quality produce linked to their own specifications. Supermarkets prefer to deal with a few suppliers. The 1997 European Fresh Produce Convention heard predictions from experts that each retailer would limit its preferred distributors to '*no more than three per commodity group*', in other words three suppliers of tomatoes, cauliflowers, etc.⁴⁹ This would severely restrict any attempts at local sourcing. They are making some attempts to give UK farmers more security by introducing contracts with fixed prices but whether this will be accessible to most farmers is open to question.

Checking out the supermarkets

In 1998, The SAFE Alliance questioned all the major retailers about their Food Miles strategies. This is what they said:

- Marks and Spencer justified importing produce on the grounds that it was often more energy efficient to do so.
- Safeway (456 stores, 17 distribution centres) claimed to be at the cutting edge of the Food Miles campaign and cited its focus on reducing overall vehicle kilometres within its distribution network. It has made an effort to put freight on rail saving, they claim, more than 131,000 road kilometres.⁵⁰

- Tesco claimed 100 per cent of milk and egg sales, and 90 per cent of meat sales were UK sourced in 1997, and stated that they only purchase from abroad when produce is not available locally.
- Asda (410 vehicles covering 45 million miles) failed to give a detailed response but claim in their promotions that since 1994 miles per gallon performance has improved by 23 per cent, and their collections from suppliers have improved to save 13,300 tonnes of CO₂ emissions.⁵¹ They have also been the first to allow farmers to sell their produce direct in pilot stores.
- Waitrose claimed to support British producers and wherever possible source produce in season from local suppliers.
- Sainsbury's referred us to their biannual environmental reports which indicate a strong commitment to reducing fuel use. For instance they estimate that they will eliminate 1.6 million kilometres in 1998, cut fuel consumption by 597,000 litres and reduce CO₂ emissions by 1,530 tonnes. There are, however, no clear trends towards local sourcing.⁵²

Local alternatives

One of the very positive results of the Food Miles Campaign and the activities of other organisations and farmers has been the phenomenal rise in alternative food retailing schemes. A growing number of initiatives is available for consumers who want to address the challenge of locally sourced food. The following list is not a comprehensive one, but should illustrate the range of initiatives that now exist.

Many of these schemes, projects and businesses have demonstrated a commitment to promote the local produce of the region, although some do also work to raise the profile of their produce to a wider target group, beyond the region and even to other countries. While Sustain understands the need of all producers to find a market for their produce, it is clear that the fewer Food Miles incurred, the greater the environmental benefit, and the shorter the link between producers and consumers, the greater the understanding between buyer and seller. Farmers do need to get closer to their real customer and in many cases selling locally is one way of doing this. Further information sources are indicated at the end of this section:

Direct retailing

- *Farmers' Markets*: These differ from ordinary markets because they set out to ensure;
 - locally produced food is sold locally;
 - local consumers have a chance to talk directly to the producers; and
 - fresh, high quality produce can be bought at affordable prices.⁵³

Taking place in town centres, there are over 35 farmers' markets helping to revitalise centres, ensure easy access to fresh produce and provide a forum for local distinctiveness. The markets also help to secure an income for small farmers and local business, and provide local employment. Apart from reducing unnecessary Food Miles, farmers' markets also reduce packaging. Farmers' markets are often open to local allotment holders, local groups and gardeners to sell excess produce.

- *Organic Box Schemes*: The Soil Association maintains a list of over 300 Organic Box Schemes, which are proliferating across the country. The idea is a simple one. Customers agree to support a farmer (or farm co-operative) by buying produce all through the year, paying a weekly set fee, in exchange the farmer agrees to deliver a bag or box of fresh produce every week. The level of commitment varies, but in general, customers get a regular supply of fresh organic produce and the farmers get a guaranteed income all through the year.
- *Farm Shops*: The Farm Retail Association collates information on hundreds of farm shops and Pick-Your-Own enterprises all across the UK.

Regional focus groups

- *Taste of the West* - The regional association for speciality food and drink producers and processors from Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. The group was founded in 1991 and provides members with a range of support and marketing services to promote West Country produce within the region and beyond.
- *North West Fine Foods* - The group for speciality food and drink producers in Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside. NWFF has a special focus on Local Produce Promotion which, "*aims to encourage the use of local produce in local outlets, thus generating economic development in the local area, often predominantly rural, for the producers, outlets and supply businesses*".
- *East Anglia Food Links* - works to promote and develop local food growing initiatives and raise public awareness of food issues in East Anglia.

Growing your own

Gardeners, allotment holders and community gardens have the opportunity to pursue an even more direct and local system, by growing their own food. A recent report by Sustain - *City Harvest: the feasibility of growing more food in London* - showed the potential for food growing

in London. That 20 per cent of Londoner's fruit and vegetable requirements could be grown in London itself was startling enough. The potential benefits for society as a whole were shown to be considerable as individuals and communities, the environment, public health, schools and children, and those with health problems could all gain from more urban food growing initiatives. A number of groups aim to support these activities which can offer a range of benefits.⁵⁴

Consumer choice

The following examples reflect the choices available for consumers today, what one might term 'the long and the short of it'.⁵⁵

The most localised food delivery system

The example chosen for 'the most localised food delivery system' is the newly established Farmers' Market in Huddersfield. The first farmers' market in the North of England, it was developed as part of the Kirklees Local Agenda 21 process and was driven by a commitment to a sustainable system of local affordable produce. The benefits of farmers' markets include increased communication and understanding between producers and consumers, provision of fresh, nutritious food, as well as cutting down Food Miles and transport pollution. *'There are two conditions - all produce on sale must be grown or reared within a 40 mile radius of Holmfirth and the farmers or producers themselves must be there to sell it.'*⁵⁶

The Farmers' Market in Huddersfield has the potential to improve elements of local food security by maintaining the diversity of species and the local distinctiveness of fruit and vegetables and encouraging the continued use of traditional and rare animal breeds. Much of the produce sold will be organically produced. As this uses natural systems to grow food rather than artificial fertilisers and pesticides, environmental benefits are also being gained. *'Local distinctiveness will be increased with local specialities not available from supermarkets being sold at such markets, such as rare varieties of apples, local cheeses, organic lamb.'*⁵⁷

The impact on Food Miles is two-fold. Firstly, the Farmers' Markets will be held in the town centre with easy access by public transport which reduces reliance on the car and so reduces carbon emissions. This also means access to facilities is increased, as all sections of the community will be served not just those who have access to a car. Second, the produce on sale at the Farmers' Market is all local.

The least localised food delivery system

The example chosen for "the least localised delivery system" is a bottle of Naya Canadian natural spring water. This particular brand is just one of several sold in the UK but is representative of an unsustainable product which is often being sold under the marketing concept of health and freshness, both of which are rather distorted when considering the wider picture. The process of transporting spring water over 3,000 miles to a market that has multiple sources of mineral and spring water on its doorstep has a high environmental impact. The sale price does not reflect the extra 'hidden' costs: monetary, environmental and health. On a global scale, bottling spring water increases the energy use per litre of water consumed. Pollution and non-renewable fuel consumption increases and both people's health and their environment suffer. By demanding a more 'natural' source of water we are not improving our quality of life but adding to the unsustainable global food delivery system of bottled spring water. If drinking bottled water is a must then buying bottled UK water will help reduce the environmental impact.

Recommendations for action

Consumers can have a huge influence over the food industry. Purchasing decisions in the shops can make a tremendous difference to the way food is produced and to how far it travels before it is bought. Although there is now a far greater awareness of the issues, the problem of Food Miles remains and so we feel justified in including the recommendations from the original *Food Miles Report*.

Action by individuals

1. When buying food that can be grown in the region, i.e. Europe, individuals could follow a hierarchy of purchasing priorities:
 - (i) buy locally produced food (which should therefore be seasonal);
 - (ii) buy nationally;
 - (iii) buy from the region.
2. When buying food that cannot be grown in the region, such as tea, coffee, bananas, or chocolate, individuals should buy fair trade products where these are available.
3. Consumers should try to buy locally produced, seasonal fresh produce when available, from small, local shops and markets, and request that produce be stocked from farms in the surrounding area.
4. Individuals could investigate setting up their own local produce marketing scheme or join an existing one [see Soil Association - address at end].
5. People could grow their own food, in gardens or allotments.
6. Individuals could write to their MP and MEP, to MAFF and the new Food Standards Agency and to supermarkets and food manufacturers, demanding a clear labelling system showing the distance food has travelled and its country or countries of origin.

Action by farmers and growers

1. Examine the potential to market produce locally. [see Soil Association and Farm Retail Association, addresses at end].
2. Diversify production for local consumption, and introduce more value-adding of foods on-farm.

Action by food retailers and processors

1. Retailers and manufacturers should give priority to sourcing locally, transporting more food by rail freight, reducing overall fuel consumption, and stocking or using fair trade products. Greater local autonomy in purchasing within supermarket chains can allow for more local sourcing and greater regional diversity.
2. Retailers and processors should introduce national labelling schemes showing Food Miles and the country / countries of origin, on fresh and processed products, and/or - in the case of retailers - itemised till receipts to show country/countries of origin of foods.
3. Reusable packaging schemes should be (re-)introduced (which is easier when products are sourced locally).
4. MAFF and the meat industry need to support the development of mobile abattoirs which can reduce the distance that animals have to travel, reducing stress and Food Miles.
5. A pilot study in Oxfordshire showed that home delivery schemes (which are being introduced by some retailers) can make substantial reductions to the Food Miles generated once the food is in the store.⁵⁸

Action by local authorities

1. Use existing powers (Planning Policy Guidelines 6 and 13 for example) to encourage and revitalise small, local and/or high street shops, and local markets.
2. Encourage local Farmers' Markets, as in Bath and Pannier Market in Barnstaple.
3. Use the land use planning system, through structure plans or unitary development plans, to control the sitings of supermarkets and centralised distribution facilities.

Action by national governments

1. Research indicates that lorries cover only 69 per cent of their full social and environmental costs⁵⁹ so measures must be introduced to reduce the long-distance transport of foods, particularly by air and road freight. These should include: a lorry weight-distance tax to ensure the heavier more damaging traffic is costed properly; continued use of the fuel duty escalator to ensure industry is encouraged to be more efficient and move onto rail, water and local sourcing; and introducing a much needed tax on aviation fuel.
2. Products should be required to carry information to consumers to show the country/countries of origin for fresh and processed foods, the distance imported, and the mode of transportation used.
3. Assistance should be provided for direct marketing schemes, such as information on how to set them up and cheap loans or grants.
4. Food From Britain (the DTI and food and drink industry sponsored UK food and drink export marketing consultancy) should be transformed so that its emphasis is on import substitution not export promotion.
5. MAFF and the meat industry need to support the development of mobile abattoirs which can reduce the distance that animals have to travel, reducing stress and Food Miles.
6. Aid and debt-relief should be linked to sustainable development initiatives such as diversification, sustainable agricultural production and environmental protection. Government should lobby international agencies such as the IMF to implement multilateral debt-relief and promote sustainable agriculture.
7. Pressure should be exerted for the multilateral adoption of minimum standards for working conditions, environmental protection, and animal welfare in the production of goods and services, at both European and international levels.

Contact List

A list of organisations to turn to for further help and advice (sending an SAE with your enquiry to non-profit making organisations will help reduce their costs):

Box schemes and farmers' markets

The Soil Association
Bristol House
40-56 Victoria Street
Bristol BS1 6BY

Marks and Spencer
Michael House,
47 Baker Street,
London
W1 1DN

Seeds and advice on growing your own fruit and vegetables

Henry Doubleday Research Association
Ryton Organic Gardens
Ryton-on-Dunsmore
Coventry CV8 3LG

Safeway
6 Millington Road,
Hayes,
Middx UB3 4AY

Transport campaigns

Women's Environmental Network
PO Box 30626
London E1 1TZ

J Sainsbury
Rennie House,
Rennie Street,
London SE1 9LL

Friends of the Earth
26-28 Underwood Street
London N1 7JQ

Somerfield
Somerfield House,
Hawkfield Business Park,
Whitchurch Lane,
Bristol BS14 0TJ

Transport 2000
12-18 Hoxton Street
London N1 6NG

Tesco
Delamere Road,
Cheshunt,
Herts EN8 9SL

Fair Trade and developing country initiatives

Christian Aid
Interchurch House
Lower Marsh
London SE1 7RT

Waitrose
Southern Industrial Area,
Bracknell
RG12 8YA

The Fairtrade Foundation
105 Euston Road,
London NW1 2ED

Regional promotions
North West Fine Foods
Old Council Offices
High Street
Garstang
Preston PR3 1BR

Farm shops

Farm Retail Association
Agriculture House,
164 Shaftesbury Avenue,
London WC2H 8HL

Taste of the West Ltd
Agriculture House
Pynes Hill
Rydon Lane
Exeter EX2 5ST

Food and quality issues

Food Commission
94 White Lion Street
London N1 9PF

East Anglia Food Links
49a High Street
Watton
Thetford
IP25 6AB

Major retailers

ASDA
Asda House,
Southbank,
Great Wilson Street,
Leeds LS11 5AD

References

- ¹ The SAFE Alliance merged with the National Food Alliance in April of 1999. The new organisation, called Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, continues to work on Food Miles and related issues.
- ² Paxton A, 1994, *The Food Miles Report: the dangers of long distance transport of food*, SAFE Alliance
- ³ Connon, J and Schiek W, 1997, *Food Processing: an industrial powerhouse in transition*, Wiley
- ⁴ Grocer, 08 February 1997, 'How good can we get?' Focus on warehouse & distribution
- ⁵ ISEC, 1998, Expanding Infrastructures in *Small is Beautiful, Big is Subsidised*, International Society for Ecology and Culture, Dartington, Devon
- ⁶ MAFF, 1999, *Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1998*, HMSO, London
- ⁷ Nexus Choat Market review tables 1998
- ⁸ Hoskins R, 1998, *How Green are our Apples?* SAFE Alliance
- ⁹ Hoskins R, 1998, *The Pear Essentials*, SAFE Alliance
- ¹⁰ Hoskins R, 1998, *Where's the Beef?*, SAFE Alliance
- ¹¹ Hoskins R, 1998, *The Perfect Pint*, SAFE Alliance
- ¹² Soil Association press release and briefing, 16 September 1999
- ¹³ Compassion in World Farming press release, 6 October 1999
- ¹⁴ Rankine K, 1999, *Soya: the ubiquitous bean*, SAFE Alliance
- ¹⁵ MAFF 1999, *Agriculture in the UK 1998*, HMSO, London
- ¹⁶ Cooper D, 1996, Diminishing returns in the global market of sameness, *Scotland on Sunday* 22 September 1996
- ¹⁷ Cooper D, 1996, *ibid*
- ¹⁸ Cooper D, 1996, *ibid*
- ¹⁹ ITN News item about Buy British with NFU representative 18 January 1999
- ²⁰ Jones A, 1999, PhD Thesis Summary, *A Means/End Analysis of Apples*, unpublished
- ²¹ DETR, 1999, *Transport of Goods by Road 1998*, HMSO, London
- ²² *Transport Statistics Great Britain 1997*, HMSO London
- ²³ DETR, 1997, *Energy and Environment Transport Statistics*, HMSO, London
- ²⁴ Friends of the Earth, 1999, *Road Transport and Air Pollution*, FoE, London
- ²⁵ Transport 2000, 1999, *Transport Retort*, Transport 2000, London
- ²⁶ Friends of the Earth, 1999, *Road Transport and Air Pollution*, FoE, London
- ²⁷ *Financial Times*, 10 October 1996
- ²⁸ *Air Mail*, Autumn 1998, *The Right Price for Air Travel*, Friends of the Earth Netherlands, Amsterdam, quoting US Citizens Aviation Watch Letter to US Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics from website <http://www.nonoise.org>
- ²⁹ Paxton A, *op cit*
- ³⁰ Incpen, 1997, *A working partnership tipping the scales in favour of the environment*, Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment, Incpen.
- ³¹ MAFF, 1998, *National Food Survey 1998*, HMSO, London
- ³² Hoskins R, 1998, *How Green are our Apples?* and *The Pear Essentials*, SAFE Alliance
- ³³ Blythman J, 10 May 1997, Food Chains, *Guardian* 1997
- ³⁴ Blythman J, 1997, *The Food We Eat*, Michael Joseph
- ³⁵ Rankine K, 1997, *How Green are our Strawberries?*, SAFE Alliance
- ³⁶ *The Grower* page 10, 19 August 1999
- ³⁷ SAFE Alliance, 1997, *Potatoes, People and Pollution*. SAFE Alliance
- ³⁸ NFU website - *Keep Britain Farming*, August 1999
- ³⁹ *The Grocer*, 3 October 1998, *Gill points the finger*
- ⁴⁰ Hoskins R, 1998, *Where's the Beef?*, SAFE Alliance
- ⁴¹ *The Grower*, 19 August 1999
- ⁴² Christian Aid, 1996, *The Global Supermarket*, Christian Aid, London
- ⁴³ SAFE Alliance, 1996, *The Food Miles Action Pack*, SAFE Alliance
- ⁴⁴ *How Green are our Strawberries?*, *Potatoes, People and Pollution*, *Abusing our Loaf*, all in 1997, *The Perfect Pint?*, *Where's the Beef?*, *How Green are our Apples?*, *The Pear Essentials* all in 1998, *Carrot Fashion* and *Soya: the ubiquitous bean* published in 1999. All produced by the SAFE Alliance.
- ⁴⁵ *NFU Magazine*, Summer 1999
- ⁴⁶ Breach J, 1999, *Excess Fuel Factor*, press release to Worshipful Company of Fruiterers, Tonbridge Kent
- ⁴⁷ MAFF news release, 3 February 1999
- ⁴⁸ *The Grocer*, October 1995
- ⁴⁹ NFU representative in the *Guardian*, 4 January 1999
- ⁵⁰ Safeway, 1999, booklet *Responsible Retailer*
- ⁵¹ Asda website, www.asda.co.uk
- ⁵² J Sainsbury plc, 1998, *Environmental Report*, 1999, J Sainsbury, London
- ⁵³ Chapman D, 1998, Farmers' markets *Community Health Action*, Issue 46
- ⁵⁴ SAFE / National Food Alliance, 1996 *Growing Food in Cities*, and Sustain, 1999, *CityHarvest: the feasibility of growing more food in London*
- ⁵⁵ Two case studies which SAFE submitted to the UK Food Group's Food Awards in 1998
- ⁵⁶ Gleadow J, 3 July 1998, *The Holme Valley Express*
- ⁵⁷ Crossley P, 27 April 1998, Letter in *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*
- ⁵⁸ Transport 2000, 1997, *Transport Retort* 20/5 Sep/Oct, pp8 & 9

⁵⁹ Transport 2000, April 1999, A study by Oxford Economic Research Associates quoted in *Transport Retort*, newsletter



Food miles - Still on the road to ruin?

A SUSTAIN PUBLICATION 1999

ISBN 1 903060-03-6

Price £7.50

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

94 WHITE LION STREET LONDON N1 9PF

tel: 020-7837-1228 • fax: 020-7837-1141

e-mail: sustain@sustainweb.org

website: www.sustainweb.org

Printed on recycled paper