

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES



Memo from MFJ

We may have supermarkets the size of small cities. We may have food technologists who can make anything taste like anything else. But we could learn from other countries about how to help consumers choose healthful foods.

■ **Kids.** Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden have banned TV ads aimed at children. U.S. parents would probably *pay* companies to make up for lost revenue...as long as it meant no more sad-eyed youngsters pleading for the latest toy or junk food. In the 1970's, the Federal Trade Commission tried to ban kids' ads here. Not surprisingly, the food, toy, broadcasting, and advertising industries convinced Congress to squash the effort.

■ **Helpful Food Labels.** The American Heart Association allows companies to use a "Heart-Check" symbol on foods that meet its criteria. But the check isn't widely used, partly because the association charges a fee, partly because the program isn't government-backed, and partly because so few foods qualify. Why hasn't the FDA devel-



Swedish shoppers find the most-healthful foods by looking for the keyhole.

oped its own program nationwide? Other countries have.

The Swedish government, for example, uses a keyhole symbol to help shoppers spot good foods. To qualify, breads have to be whole-grain, pastas must be at least 50 percent whole-grain, ready-to-eat dishes can't get more than 30 percent of their calories from fat, and milk can't be more than 1/2 percent fat. A U.S. "keyhole" symbol would help simplify our Nutrition Facts labels.

Imagine being able to tell your child to "buy any snack you want, as long as the package has a keyhole." It could revolutionize grocery shopping—and would encourage companies to improve their products.

And if you're in Australia, Thailand, or the European Union, there's QUID—quantitative ingredient declaration. It means that packages disclose the percentages of the key ingredients. So EU shoppers, for example, can see what percentage of a jar of strawberry jam is strawberries and what percentage of a yogurt is sugar.

We'd love to see what percentage of Congress (and FDA officials) is interested in protecting kids and helping shoppers buy good foods. We plan to find out, as we press the government to bring U.S. standards into line with international norms.

U.S. companies that market foods in Australia and other countries have no trouble following those nations' labeling laws. If they can help foreign consumers pick the healthiest foods, why can't they do the same for U.S. shoppers?

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Correction

Due to an editing error in the November issue ("The Top Ten Supplements: How Safe?" p. 7), we said that St John's wort may increase the activity of protease inhibitors, digitalis, statins, warfarin, chemotherapy drugs, oral contraceptives, tricyclic antidepressants, and clozapine, olanzapine, and theophylline. In fact, St John's wort may decrease the activity of those drugs.

The contents of NAH are not intended to provide medical advice, which should be obtained from a qualified health professional.

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