

Honey, are we poisoning the kids?

The answer is probably yes, reveals an analysis of typical children's menus

For a country which has always proclaimed the excellence of its cooking and the quality of ingredients on sale, it is an appalling indictment. French mothers who routinely shop for food for their children are unwittingly poisoning them with potentially carcinogenic products. And in all likelihood the same applies to mothers anywhere in the EU.

Typical home meals served to French 10-year-olds contained nearly 100 chemical residues, some of them potentially carcinogenic. A shocking report, published on December 1 by the association Générations Futures, charts the results of a survey of standard food. Researchers went shopping in Paris and in the Oise, north of the capital. They followed nutritional recommendations of the French Health Ministry and between July and September filled their trolleys with non-organic food said to be "generally consumed by a 10-year-old".

The daily menus they came up with comprised three main meals and an afternoon *goûter*, including five fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and fish, three dairy products and water, plus some 'goodies' like chewing gum and biscuits. The researchers asked French and Belgian state-approved laboratories to analyse the food they bought and the results were horrifying. The laboratories were asked to note the presence of chemicals, pesticides, heavy metals and other pollutants. They found no fewer than 81 chemicals, including five which are carcinogenic, 42 of which are "possibly or probably" carcinogenic and 32 which are likely to upset hormonal balance. Water drunk by children with meals was found to contain nitrates and chloroform.

Worryingly, the survey noted: "In almost all cases, the legal limits imposed

Breakfast, including bread and butter, jam, grape juice and tea with milk, contained more than 10 carcinogenic residues, including three recognised as "certainly" carcinogenic, plus 20 residues likely to disrupt hormonal balance.

by the EU for each individual chemical are not being exceeded...What is particularly disturbing is the potential damage caused to growing children by the combined effect of these damaging chemicals in food."

Lunch, comprising a mixed tuna salad, minced steak, French beans, and grapes for dessert, contained chemical residues in the steak and canned tuna, plus chemicals said to be added to processed vegetables.

Générations Futures concludes that "the ultimate risk" to young consumers posed by what it calls "a cocktail of poisons" is probably underestimated and likely to be linked to growing numbers of cancer cases. A petition on their website invites the public to help put pressure on the government to legislate against toxic substances in food.

The main toxic substances identified were pesticides used in the cultivation of fruit and veg; food additives, flavourings and colourings, and other chemicals, dioxins and heavy metals assimilated from polluted air, soil or water during food production, processing and packaging.

Dinner was the most damaging to children's health, with steak and salmon the most polluted with chemical residues.

The way to avoid these will be no surprise to many: eat organic, fresh, local produce and avoid food stored or packaged in volatile metals or plastic.



Stainless steel pans seem to be the safest for cooking food.
Bon appetit, les enfants...

Tim Finan

Full details in French on the Générations Futures website: www.mdrfg.org

Updates

◆ New law on credit facilities

In future, for purchases of more than €1,000, a salesperson will be obliged by law to offer a fixed-term credit facility as well as a revolving credit. Finance Minister Christine Lagarde said that the measure will put an end to the situation "where revolving credits are often the only option offered, even when they are not the most suitable arrangement". She added that the measure would apply to mail-order and all other tele-sales.

The new law also requires obtaining formal proof of the customer's means of repayment for amounts exceeding €3,000, including proof of identity, residence and income.

◆ House-buying loan rates lowest since World War II

Interest rates on house purchase loans were 3.22% in the month of November. This is the lowest level in France since the liberation in 1944, according to a report by the Observatoire Crédit Logement CSA this week.

Monthly payments are now 10% lower than they were in August 2008, for the same amount borrowed over the same period. The Observatoire indicates that the upturn in the property market has gone a long way to make up for the effects of the 2008 crisis in many parts of the construction industry.

However, credit broker AB Courtage has warned that the very low rates may be short-lived. Between November 26 and 30, most banks increased their rates by as much as 0.25%. FW

Technically speaking with Marcus Williamson

Accessing internet via satellite

The France Numérique 2012 plan, launched by the government in October 2008, says: "...every French citizen, wherever they live shall, by 2010, enjoy the right of access to broadband internet at affordable prices of around €35 per month, inclusive of the equipment needed for access."

We've looked previously at options for getting onto the internet with broadband and dial-up. If you're in an area which still does not have broadband – and you need faster speeds than dial-up – then satellite internet may be an option, priced at around the figure indicated above.

Using internet over satellite involves sending and receiving radio signals, generated by a satellite modem, via a dish to a satellite located 36,000km above the equator.

The installation should be carried out by a professional installer, who will align the dish and configure the modem. [You can do it yourself: we

did but it took us two weeks to figure it out – Ed.] If you wish to share the connection between multiple machines you will also need a router (wireless or wired).

There are a number of providers, all using one of the two available satellite systems. Here are some of the leading providers:

Nordnet

Nordnet, a subsidiary of France Télécom, offers a range of tariffs from €34.90 to €89.90 per month. For example, for €39.90 monthly you can have a speed of 1Mbps and unlimited downloads. The equipment costs €399 unless you subscribe to a two-year contract. www.nordnet.com

Vivéole

Vivéole uses the same satellite as the Nordnet system and offers monthly packages from €24.90 to €99.90 (4Mbps and unlimited downloads). The equipment costs €349 unless you have a contract. www.viveole.fr

Tooway

A number of providers offer internet service on the Tooway system, with a maximum 3.6Mbps download speed, at between €29.90 and €99.90 monthly, with equipment priced at €200-€399:

Alsatis: www.alsatis.fr
Numéo: www.numeo.fr
sat2way: www.sat2way.com
skyDSL: www.skydsl.eu
SFR: www.sfr.fr

Tooway upgrade

French Week reader Ian Cameron, in Burgundy, told us that trying to use Skype on Tooway was causing calls to be dropped. The good news is that Tooway is making faster 'Ka-band' technology available from December 2010. Existing customers on Tooway should contact their Internet provider for details.

Email your technical questions to Marcus at: cointechno@french-week.com

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