

# We are what we eat

**A** This article is about the language used to label food products.

**A**s a food label is often nothing more than an advert to tempt you to buy the product, you should pay particular attention to the choice of words used. Always watch out for the word 'flavour', as this may mean that the product contains **synthetic**<sup>1</sup> ingredients. Chocolate-flavour topping, for example, will not contain chocolate, even though chocolate-flavoured topping will contain a small percentage – so read carefully. Many manufacturers also use a range of meaningless descriptions. Feel-good words, such as '**wholesome**<sup>2</sup>', 'farmhouse', 'original' and 'traditional' do not mean anything. Other words such as 'farm fresh' and 'country fresh' also intentionally blur the true nature of a product's source. 'Fresh egg pasta', for example, means that the pasta was indeed made with real and not powdered eggs, but maybe months ago. Words that you

can trust are 'organic', '**wholemeal**<sup>3</sup>', 'natural mineral water', '**Fair Trade**<sup>4</sup>', '**free-range**<sup>5</sup>' and the 'V' vegetarian symbol.

Consumer pressure over **GM**<sup>6</sup> foods has led to better labelling but **loopholes**<sup>7</sup> still exist. GM product **derivatives**<sup>8</sup>, such as starches, sugars, fats and oils where no genetically modified protein or DNA material still remains, still go unlabelled in many products such as cereal bars, fish fingers, jellies and vegetable burgers.

Take particular care over low-fat and low-sugar products. Guidelines state that 'low-fat' foods must not have more than 5 per cent fat, while 'reduced fat' means that the total fat content is 25 per cent less than the standard versions of the same product. The terms 'light' or 'lite' are meaningless since they could refer to texture, fat content, sugar content or even colour.

<sup>1</sup> made from artificial substances

<sup>2</sup> good for you, physically or morally

<sup>3</sup> containing all the natural substances in the grain with nothing removed

<sup>4</sup> refers to products such as coffee, tea or chocolate marketed in such a way that the small farmers in developing countries who produce them get the profits rather than large multinational companies

<sup>5</sup> relating to farm animals that are not kept in cages

<sup>6</sup> genetically modified, i.e. the genes (DNA) of a natural product have been altered in some way

<sup>7</sup> ways of getting round regulations (usually because they have not been written in a precise enough way)

<sup>8</sup> things produced from

## **B** Food metaphors

Inviting Joe and his ex-wives to the same party was a **recipe for disaster**. [situation sure to lead to]

The film has **all the ingredients of** a box office hit. [all the necessary characteristics]

Let's invite lots of friends to our wedding to **dilute** the relatives a bit. [make less dominant]

I'm not going to call him. I'm going to let him **stew** for another few days at least. [worry or suffer especially about something you think is his fault]

The police **grilled** the suspect for hours, but eventually let him go. [asked a lot of questions]

I'm sure this is going to be another of his **half-baked** schemes that never comes to anything. [unrealistic or not thought through properly]

Let's hire a karaoke machine – that'll **spice up** the office party. [make more lively]

Rick has started hanging around with some **unsavoury** characters. [unpleasant, morally offensive]

They started their business with high hopes but things soon **turned sour**. [went wrong]

Let's go for a coffee and you can tell me all the **juicy gossip**. [exciting and interesting]

# Exercises

**28.1** Answer these questions about the text in A. You may need a dictionary to help you with some of your answers.



- 1 Are food labels meant to provide information or to advertise the products?
- 2 Why do manufacturers try to hide the fact that foods contain synthetic ingredients?
- 3 In the phrase *fresh egg pasta*, does *fresh* refer to *egg* or *pasta*?
- 4 What do *organic*, *wholemeal* and *vegetarian* mean when describing food?
- 5 What does GM stand for? Explain what it means.
- 6 What is DNA?
- 7 *Cereal bars*, *fish fingers* and *vegetable burgers* are all types of fast food. Describe them.
- 8 This text is from a British magazine, so what does the word *jelly* mean? What would it mean in a US text?
- 9 How much fat would there be in *low-fat* cheese? And how much would there be in *reduced fat* cheese?

**28.2** Which do you think would be tastier and why?

- 1 strawberry flavoured yoghurt or strawberry flavour yoghurt
- 2 orange drink or orange juice
- 3 raspberry jam or raspberry flavoured jam
- 4 farmhouse chicken or free-range chicken

**28.3** As pointed out in the text, *light* is an ambiguous word, i.e. it can be understood in different ways. Explain these phrases. Where possible, suggest an opposite to *light*.

- |                       |                                    |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 light coloured hair | 6 a light aircraft                 |
| 2 a light wind        | 7 the light of my life             |
| 3 a light comedy      | 8 Got a light?                     |
| 4 a light sleeper     | 9 to light on the solution         |
| 5 to light a fire     | 10 In the light of the reports ... |

**28.4** Explain the literal meanings of the words used metaphorically in the sentences in B.

EXAMPLE recipe – instructions for cooking a dish

**28.5** Rewrite these sentences using the metaphors from B.

- 1 My mother asked me a lot of very searching questions about where I had been last night.
- 2 Let's make the evening more interesting by organising some party games.
- 3 What's been happening while I was on holiday? You must fill me in on all the interesting gossip.
- 4 Don't tell her that her briefcase has been found. Let her suffer for a bit longer – perhaps she'll be more careful with it in future.
- 5 It might be a good idea to make these investments a bit less dominant in your portfolio by exchanging some of them for others in a different line of business.
- 6 They lived together happily for many years, but things changed for the worse when his mother came to live with them.
- 7 Patience combined with interest in your pupils is bound to lead to success for a teacher.
- 8 Lance's ideas are never thought through properly.

**FOLLOW UP**

Find more food vocabulary at this site [www.bbc.co.uk/food](http://www.bbc.co.uk/food), which is an archive of recipes. Choose a recipe that interests you and note down any vocabulary that is new to you.