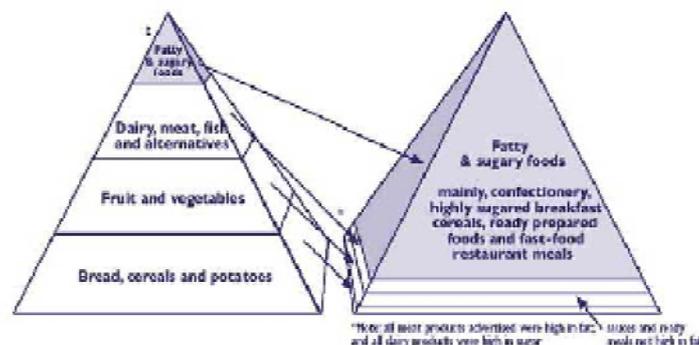


The amount of money spent on promoting foods that are either damaging the world or you or both is staggering.

The imbalance between food advertising and the promotion of healthy foods and lifestyles is huge. For example in 2000, food advertising in the UK amounted to just under £600 million for food and approaching £300 million for drinks. Only a small amount spent on fruit and vegetables, around £16 million, which also included the promotion of tinned and frozen products. The Food Standards Agency spent less than £10 million on promoting better eating (Future of Farming 03).

As the obesity epidemic clearly shows, the general population is not well informed about food choices with the foods that are being most commonly consumed being the ones most widely promoted. By and large advertising is directed at selling foods with high levels of fat, sugar and salt. As example the average candy bar in the US has an advertising budget of around \$30 to \$50million (Nestle 06). In 2002, the world wide advertising budget was in the order of \$US40 billion. Coca Cola's advertising budget was \$1.5 billion, Nestle \$1.9 billion, McDonald's \$1.2 billion, Mars \$1.2 billion, Pepsi \$0.7 billion.

An excellent illustration of the level of junk food promotion is by the redrawing of the food pyramid concept in proportion to the actual amount of advertising money spent on the various food categories.



This diagram has been reproduced from Dalmeny et al, Journal of the HEIA. (Dalmeny 04)

Is is not only the TV and magazine advertising. Extensive use is made of the internet, schools, sporting events and the like. Promotion has penetrated virtually every activity and is almost impossible to escape. This is the capitalistic free market operating. Market forces will not promote healthy eating, it will simply intensify competition and further promotion.

Targeting kids is highly effective. Anyone who says that junk food advertising directed towards children does not increase the consumption of these foods and as a consequence, adding greatly to the obesity epidemic is not speaking truthfully. There is a highly developed science behind this type of marketing to manipulate people's choices through their children and a mountain of evidence to show that it is (Dalmeny 04). The industry denies this assertion with a very similar set of arguments to those who

opposed the banning of cigarette promotion and advertisement.

Why are these products so heavily promoted? The simple answer is profitability. In the case of potato crisps and soft drinks, the cost of the basic ingredients is tiny often less than 5% of the marketed cost of the product. Hence the potential profits are huge even after paying for expensive advertising and slotting fees to supermarkets.

How can the good message be promoted? Food labelling while very useful to the well informed is often ignored by the bulk of customers who do not understand the information given. Worse still is that many processed foods are promoted with spurious or misleading claims as to their health benefits. The only way forward is for government intervention since market forces as noted above will not have little impact since it is unlikely that there will be widespread boycotting of unhealthy products currently marketed. As these food industries form very significant parts of our current economies, this is almost an insurmountable task.

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