

A Describing food products

Food production has become increasingly industrialised and globalised, and so knowing what our food contains has become more and more important. Labels do not always help. Adjectives such as **'wholesome'**¹, 'farm fresh' and 'homemade' can be rather vague and meaningless, while the international numbering system for **additives**² is often incomprehensible to people. Some familiar descriptions, however, do have a clear official meaning, for example **'wholefoods'**³, **'free-range'**⁴ eggs, **'gluten-free'**⁵ bread or 'contains no artificial colours or **preservatives**⁶'. Clear and scientifically accurate descriptions can be vital for people who suffer from food **allergies**⁷ and for vegetarians or **vegans**⁸ who want to know exactly what is in a product, as well as being important for consumers looking for natural or **unprocessed**⁹ foods, or those concerned about **animal welfare**¹⁰ who may wish to avoid food produced by **battery-farming**¹¹ methods and so on. With the growth in popularity of **convenience foods**¹², alongside public health concerns over bad diet and obesity, simple and unambiguous **nutrition labels**¹³ are more important than ever. An example of a simple system is **traffic-light labelling**¹⁴, which indicates high (red), medium (amber) or low (green) levels of such things as fat, sugar and salt. Finally, good labelling tells us where the food was produced and under what conditions, for example **fair trade**¹⁵ products.

¹ good for you

² substance added to food to improve its taste or appearance or to preserve it

³ foods that have not had any of their natural features taken away or any artificial substances added

⁴ produced by farm animals that are allowed to move around outside and are not kept in cages or stalls

⁵ not containing a protein which is contained in wheat and some other grains

⁶ chemicals used to stop food from decaying

⁷ condition that makes a person become ill or develop skin or breathing problems because they have eaten certain foods or been near certain substances. The related adjective is **allergic (to)**.

⁸ person who does not eat or use any animal products, such as meat, fish, eggs or cheese

⁹ which have not been treated with chemicals that preserve them or give them extra taste or colour

¹⁰ taking care of animals

¹¹ system of producing a large quantity of eggs or meat cheaply by keeping a lot of birds in rows of small cages

¹² foods that are almost ready to eat or are quick to prepare

¹³ labels that indicate how the food influences your health

¹⁴ labels with colours like traffic lights that give information on nutrition

¹⁵ a way of buying and selling products that makes certain that the original producer receives a fair price

B Food metaphors

Inviting Sophie and her ex-husband to the same party was a **recipe for disaster**. [situation sure to lead to]
When asked why he didn't turn up to the exam, he **cooked up a story** about his kitchen being flooded. [made up, invented]

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

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 that person's fault; you can also say **stew in your own juice**]

It's kind of you to invite me, but ballet isn't really **my cup of tea**. [not the type of thing that I like]

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 will never come 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

23.1 Read the comments and then answer the questions.

Carlos



I never buy eggs that come from battery farms. They have no flavour.

Beth



I can't be bothered cooking. I just buy ready-made meals and tins of stuff.

Rowan



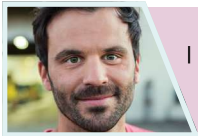
It worries me that farm animals are sometimes treated so badly.

Hannah



I can't eat curry. It makes me come out in red spots.

Thomas



I want my food to be 100% natural.

Atsuko



I always buy coffee that gives growers in developing countries a decent price.

- 1 Who is concerned about animal welfare?
- 2 Who wants food without additives?
- 3 Who uses a fair trade product?
- 4 Who has a food allergy?
- 5 Who uses convenience foods?
- 6 Who prefers a free-range product?

23.2 Complete the sentences. The first letter of the missing word is given.

- 1 The label gave no n..... information, so I didn't know if it was good for me.
- 2 The t.....-..... system of labelling is easy to understand with just three familiar colours.
- 3 I try to make my diet as w..... as possible and not eat things which I know are bad for me.
- 4 It's sometimes difficult to find u..... foods – everything seems to contain chemicals or preservatives of some kind.
- 5 My sister has to have a g..... diet as wheat makes her ill.
- 6 The laws governing b..... f..... were changed recently and birds must have larger cages now.
- 7 I'm a vegetarian but I don't think I could ever become a v..... I would find the diet too restrictive.
- 8 My diet is mostly natural foods because I buy a lot of w.....

23.3 Rewrite these sentences using the metaphors from B opposite. You are given a clue in brackets.

- 1 My mother asked me a lot of very searching questions about where I had been last night. (grill)
- 2 I feel I need something more exciting to make my life more interesting. (spice)
- 3 What's been happening recently? You must fill me in on all the interesting gossip. (juice)
- 4 Don't tell her that her phone has been found. Let her suffer for a bit longer – perhaps she'll be more careful with it in future. (stew)
- 5 He wanted me to go to the match with him, but rugby just isn't something I like. (tea)
- 6 They lived together happily for many years, but things changed for the worse when his mother came to live with them. (sour)
- 7 Patience combined with interest in your pupils is bound to lead to success for a teacher. (recipe)
- 8 Jake's ideas are never thought through properly. (bake)
- 9 There were some very unpleasant and offensive characters at that party. (savoury)
- 10 He has invented a crazy scheme for making money on the internet. It has all the necessary characteristics of a complete disaster. (cook, ingredient)