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Tekst 11

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Food Standards Agency's fear of chocolate absurd?

NOTEBOOK BY MICK HUME

NO, IT WAS not a sugar rush to the brain from eating too much chocolate. I really did see it reported that Cadbury is to bury 250 tons of the stuff that is perfectly safe to eat.

Cadbury has been condemned for failing to tell the government Food Standards Agency in January that a leaking water pipe had left minute traces of salmonella in some chocolate. Amid claims that this could have caused a recent outbreak of salmonella poisoning in Britain, the FSA has ordered the company to take bestselling products off the shelves.

Let us digest a few facts. Cadbury points out it is generally accepted that salmonella can cause mild stomach upset when it reaches a level of a million cells per 100g of food product. The company's standard alert level is 10 cells per 100g. The January contamination was measured at just 0.3 cells per 100g. Even a non-expert such as me can spot the difference between a million and 0.3. As for the "outbreak" of a rare strain of salmonella poisoning, that was an increase from 14 cases in 2005 to

around 50 in the same period this year. An epidemic it ain't.

Nor is there evidence that a contaminated batch of chocolate caused these few upset tummies. In any case, the Cadbury's chocolate produced in January is likely to have long since been scoffed. So what is withdrawing a million different bars months later supposed to be a "precaution" against?

It might sound reasonable for experts to declare that "the acceptable level of salmonella in food is zero". But our food can carry minute traces of all manner of unappetising matter. It does us no harm. Nor does it alter the fact that we have the healthiest diet in human history, protected by tests so stringent they can detect risks that our bodies do not even notice.

Cadbury is big enough to defend itself. It is the rest of us I am worried about, living in a superstitious society where it is deemed wise to bury tons of perfectly good foodstuff, and where government agencies treat us like milky children in need of protection from hypothetical evils, and too much chocolate.

YOUR REACTIONS

I wonder how many people realise their bodies are teeming with bacteria? Those ridiculous adverts for anti-bacterial household soaps always give me a laugh.

Ian, Nottingham, UK

It also indicates what a whimperish, useless, frightened-to-do-anything country we have become. If we continue allowing the HSE, EA and FSA, and all the other bureaucratic 'deadweights' to continue to stop us from doing anything this country will soon go down the drain. The HSE et al should have their budgets cut in half so that they cannot continue to invent risks to keep people in gainful employment.

Roland McKie, Southampton, UK

Cadbury's are correct that generally millions of salmonella cells per 100g are needed to cause food poisoning; unfortunately, this is not true for chocolate. In similar outbreaks of salmonella involving chocolate far lower levels of salmonella were needed to induce poisoning. It is believed that the chocolate proteins protect the salmonella cells through the stomach and into the gut allowing poisoning to occur with small dose levels.

Alex Maund, London, UK

This article demonstrates beautifully how risk averse the government of our country is at the moment. People would be OK if the authorities just let us get on with life. No one wants salmonella, but living in fear of a chocolate-induced food poisoning death puts a downer on your whole day. Is it possible to turn back the clock to when the government simply didn't care what happened to the population?

Chris Murphie, Portsmouth, UK

In reply to Chris Murphie, the government does little to protect ordinary people from burglars or other layabouts. One wonders why it goes through the motions with food safety and "5 portions a day"; maybe because words cost them so little.

Michael Gorman, Guildford, Surrey, UK ■

Lees bij de volgende opgave eerst de vraag voordat je de bijbehorende tekst raadpleegt.

Tekst 11 Food Standards Agency's fear of chocolate absurd?

- 1p **44** Is er onder de brieverschrijvers iemand die het eens zou kunnen zijn met de opdracht van de Food Standards Agency aan Cadbury's met betrekking tot hun chocola? Zo nee, antwoord "nee". Zo ja, schrijf de naam van die persoon op.