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GET WRITING! SPECIAL

Did you like what you read in our last issue? Did it inspire you, help you or make you think? Did you read something that you disagree with? Then write in to let us know – we'd love to hear from you.



Letter of the quarter

In this issue we publish a letter by Vegetarian Guides founder Alex Bourke in response to the extended article in our Autumn issue, "Raw nutrition and health: your biggest questions answered".

It was terrific to see this magazine initiate a debate that is long overdue in its last issue, with 12 raw food gurus expounding their various positions on issues such as veganism, raw chocolate and how much fruit to eat.

I've always been perplexed by the mixed messages, such as, "Eat only whole, local fruit and veg" versus "Have some of this magic powder from the other side of the world which I just happen to be selling for £30 a kilo." And "Eat raw chocolate, which I also happen to be selling," versus "Chocolate is poison." I don't know who's right, but I do know that selective citation by folks who are selling stuff was what got us the catastrophic original four food groups 50 years ago.

And then there are the generalizations based on individual experience. You can't digest sprouted grains, so how does that prove I can't? I mean, I can't eat celery, but that in no way implies you can't.

From 1993 to 2007 I was a trustee of the Vegan Society, plotting to empower vegans to take over the world's food supply, save the animals and humans, and put back the forests. Veganism, which had been a bit of a black art since the word was invented in 1944, was finally put on a solid, evidence-based foundation, and some spectacular mistakes were corrected.

Studies with sample sizes too small to be statistically significant and those with poor methodology funded by vested interests or over-optimistic zealots were weeded out. The RDA for B12 was shown to be 3mcg not 1mcg, and 10mcg if taking a daily supplement. It was also established that the earlier recommendation that seaweeds are a good source of B12 was completely wrong – the stuff that looks like B12 in seaweed actually is not.

Having put veganism on a solid, evidence-based foundation, the Vegan Society now dialogues with government and has already influenced the UK Food Standards Agency to classify cheese as a red traffic light (i.e. junk) food.

It grinds my gears hearing about unnamed enzymes from people who are not biochemists, while the Vegetarian & Vegan Foundation's Dr Justine Butler, who does have a PhD in biochemistry and molecular biology, states that the vast majority of

food enzymes (with the exceptions of bromelain from pineapple and papain from papaya) are broken down during digestion.

It makes me wonder whether this whole enzyme story is a case of the Emperor's New Clothes, just like B12 in seaweed? If it isn't, I want to see diagrams of named molecules and reactions, like the one in Stephen Walsh's *Plant Based Nutrition & Health* that explains how folic acid and B12 recycle homocysteine.

Before becoming a vegan writer, I used to clear up software disasters in blue-chip corporations. But I was not one of those cowboy programmers with a few weeks or months training in an almost completely unregulated profession (see where I'm going with this?) No siree, I was one of a handful of software *engineers* with two relevant degrees, several years' experience, and I had to pass a rigorous selection board to be granted the title of Chartered Engineer, just like the people who build bridges and planes, or doctors, or lawyers, or pretty much any profession where if you get it wrong people's lives or businesses could be ruined.

And the most vital rule of the engineers', or surgeons', or lawyers', code of conduct is when asked to do something outside my training and experience, instead of leaping at the chance to experiment on the client, I must declare it and recommend bringing in a different specialist.

For raw food to be taken seriously by the mainstream to the point where governments and doctors will stop scoffing at it and get curious, biochemists must suss



what is really going on in blenders, in juicers and deep inside people. Raw fooders and their non raw siblings need to track diet and health over years in independently run, large-scale trials. And a dialogue must be established with devil's advocate peer reviewers of this research.

I postulate that 90% of any raw food system is likely to be spot on and 10% will need revising, but right now no one can prove which 10%. Resolving this requires documenting not just success stories, but also looking at people who did not thrive and figuring out why. I'd love to be raw, but right now I'm totally confused. Raw food must move beyond rhetoric and charm to become a *science*. And the writers and readers of *Get Fresh!* are the best people in the world to make this happen.

Alex Bourke, BSc, MSc, is the founder of Vegetarian Guides and a former Chair of the Vegan Society. The sixth edition of his *Vegetarian London* guidebook and the forthcoming *Vegetarian Britain 4* include raw sections by *Get Fresh!* magazine.

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