

Smoothie operators?



Smoothie companies are profiting from a health boom, but are their ethics as pure as the fruit they include? Dr Nicola Scott investigates...

Smoothies are certainly very popular. Last year, Britons drank 34 million litres of them, enough to fill 14 Olympic sized swimming pools.¹ In 2006 £170 million worth of smoothies were sold in the UK,² and last December the BBC reported an approaching "smoothie war" between smoothie bar chains jostling for consumer loyalty in an increasingly health-conscious society.³ Given the health benefits often claimed by companies, are these images justified and do their ethical credentials match the health claims? Or is there some pulp fiction going on?

5 a day?

The UK's National Health Service's recent drive for us to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily came at a time when British teenagers were found not to be eating them. The UK was 19th out of 21 of the world's economically richest countries in terms of the percentage of 11, 13 and 15 year olds who reported eating fruit every day.⁴ Smoothies have often been marketed as products which could contribute to buck this trend, helping us to achieve the government's 5-a-day target. However, Department of Health guidelines state that a drink can only ever count as one portion despite the amount you drink or however many fruits are blended - a message backed by the Food Standards

Fruit Hit Smoothies (01179 175 620) and **Soma Organic Smoothies** (0870 9507662) come out best on the table. Fruit Hit smoothies are Fairtrade while Soma's are organic.

Agency. Some companies in our table have been criticised for suggesting that their products included more than one portion of fruit. However Dr Cathy Higginson of Health Scotland added that some smoothies appear to have higher levels of fibre and the guidelines might need clarification.⁵

In an attempt to make fruit smoothies more appealing to children, in May 2007 Innocent announced that its Kids Smoothies would be sold in McDonald's Happy Meals in a few UK branches in the North East.⁶ Given criticisms made of fast food chains such as those in the films 'Supersize Me' and 'Fast Food Nation', Innocent's customers had mixed views about this decision:

"I don't see it as supporting McDonalds' ethics, I see it as helping the children who eat there to be a bit healthier."

"What were you thinking of - McJuice, McSmoothie or McDollar?"

Surely others must ensure that children eat fruit long before they become a consumer in a fast food restaurant, such as their parents, guardians, schools, or even the government. For example, healthy smoothies could be made more affordable in schools, or other places where children spend time.⁸

Healthy for the environment?

While drinking pure fruit smoothies is a healthier option compared to other snacks-on-the-go such as chocolate bars, the environmental impact of their production must be considered. Transporting fruit year-round from tropical climates, as well as packaging it in plastic bottles often made from non-renewable fossil fuels, can all negatively affect the environment. Annually in the UK we generate an estimated 1.5 million tonnes of plastic waste through discarded packaging.⁹ To reflect consumer interest in these issues, in March 2007 the Carbon Trust launched a Carbon Reduction Label for products.¹⁰ The Trust, a UK government-funded independent company established to help the business and public sector reduce carbon emissions (a key cause of climate change), had developed a label to demonstrate a commitment from companies to reduce their carbon footprint through cutting their carbon emissions, including carbon dioxide (CO2). In order for a company to use the label, it had to

agree to reduce its carbon footprint over two years from the date that products received the Label. Innocent's Mangoes & Passion Fruits smoothie was the company's first product to include this label.⁷ Also, by June 2007 the company predicted that its bottles will be made from post consumer recycled PET (Polyethylene terephthalate),¹¹ a plastic regarded by some environmentalists as less harmful to the environment than, for example, PVC.

Fairtrade

At the time of writing only one company in the product table, The Natural Beverage Company, had its complete range of smoothies Fairtrade certified, while Soma Organic was in the process of gaining Fairtrade accreditation. Consequently, when looking at the table it seems that incorporating ethical supply chain values has not been important to many companies, especially as many fruits used in smoothies can now be sourced from certified Fairtrade suppliers, or other accreditation schemes which address supply chain issues.

References - 1 Mintel Report, October 2006, 'Smoothies' 2 Key Note Market Report, March 2007, 'Fruit Juices & Health Drinks' 3 www.bbc.co.uk viewed 09/05/07 4 UNICEF, October 2006, 'Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries' 5 The Scotsman, 9/2/06 6 www.innocentdrinks.co.uk viewed 1/5/07 See EC105 for information about the Rainforest Alliance 7 www.innocentdrinks.co.uk viewed 2/5/07 8 Innocent Kids' range sold in schools were cheaper at the time of writing than its bottled smoothies sold in high street shops 9 Figure adapted from www.wasteonline.org.uk viewed 15/5/07 10 www.carbon-label.co.uk viewed 2/5/07 11 Fresh Trading Ltd's Sustainability Policy April 2007 12 www.ellaskitchen.co.uk viewed 26/4/07



SMOOTH MARKETING:

Links

- BBC Food in Season** www.bbc.co.uk/food/in_season - Find out which UK fruits are in season to help you to make a smoothie using locally-sourced ingredients.
- Fairtrade Foundation** www.fairtrade.org.uk 020 7405 5942 - Has information on which fruits have Fairtrade status, and where you can buy them when making your own smoothies.
- SmoothieCast** www.smoothiecast.co.uk, mail@smoothiecast.co.uk - Smoothie recipes by dedicated smoothie enthusiasts! Also includes information on Fairtrade issues and the nutritional value of different fruits.
- Waste Online** www.wasteonline.org.uk/resources/InformationSheets/Plastics.htm 0845 331 31 31 - Provides information on recycling plastic, such as plastic bottles.

BRAND	Ethiscore (out of 20)	Environment										Animals		People			Politics			+ve		COMPANY GROUP		
		Environmental Reporting	Nuclear Power	Climate Change	Pollution & Toxics	Habitats & Resources	Animal Testing	Factory Farming	Other Animal Rights	Human Rights	Workers' Rights	Supply Chain Policy	Irresponsible Marketing	Armaments	Genetic Engineering	Boycott Call	Political Activity	Anti-Social Finance	Company Ethos	Product Sustainability				
Fruit Hit Smoothie	16																				★	1	Natural Beverage Company Ltd	
Soma Organic Smoothie	16																					★	1	Soma Organic
Organic Smoothie Greens	14																						1	Dr Gillian McKeith
Smoothie Fruits	14																						1	Ella's Kitchen (Brands) Ltd
Innocent (CO2 labelled)	13	○																					0.5	Fresh Trading Ltd
The Big J Smoothie Smile	13	●																					1	The Juice Company (Europe) Ltd
Innocent (other)	12.5	○																						Fresh Trading Ltd
Bertrams Fruit & Veg	12	●																						Gebr. Bertrams GmbH & Co. KG
I Am Fresh Fruit Smoothie	12	●																						Wellness Foods Ltd
Serious Fruit Smoothies	11	●			○																			Jamaica Producers Group Ltd
PJ Smoothies	1.5	●		○	●	●			●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		PepsiCo Inc

KEY ● bottom rating ○ middle rating □ top rating (no criticisms found) **Company Ethos:** ★ full mark ◻ half mark **Product Sustainability:** companies can receive a maximum of five positive marks for this category. **Ethiscore:** the higher the score, the better the company across the criticism categories (see www.ethicalconsumer.org/magazine/buyers/categories.htm or "Introduction to Ethical Consumer" booklet for more details).

Company profiles

According to the **Ella's Kitchen** website all of the company's products were certified organic.¹² As Ella's Kitchen was a small to medium enterprise with an annual turnover of less than £5 million and marketed environmentally alternative products, ECRA awarded the company a clear mark for environmental reporting.

Fresh Trading Ltd only used fruit from suppliers who signed up to the minimum standards set out by the International Labour Organisation. Furthermore, the company favoured suppliers "approved by independent environmental and social auditors" and sourced fruit from farms with ethical accreditation schemes such as the one by the Rainforest Alliance.⁶ However, as the website did not contain a guarantee that all suppliers were paid a living wage and the independent auditors monitoring their working conditions were not named, ECRA awarded Fresh Trading its middle rating for supply chain policy.

PepsiCo was subject to a boycott call on the www.boycottbush.net website for donations to the US Republican Party.

The Juice Company sent ECRA a document in May 2007 which contained a section entitled 'Products & Suppliers', and a statement which read that the company aimed "to ensure that all the organisations [it] traded with met minimum ethical...standards [and the company] monitored and audited its suppliers to ensure

that [it] continued to work towards these goals". However, as no details were provided about the content of the company's supply chain policy despite ECRA's request for this information, ECRA awarded the company its worst rating for supply chain policy.

best buys