

THE SUGAR DEBATE

There is plenty of discussion currently regarding the evils of sugar in our diet and preserves in particular. I would like us to dissect this further by looking at the nature of this 'sugar'.

Artisanal production, of necessity, and I am talking jams and preserves here, uses sugars refined from sugar cane or sugar beet. By artisanal production, I take it to mean small batch, open pan production. Commercial production it would seem uses a predominance of High Fructose Corn Syrup, chemically manufactured from corn stalks. There is a great deal of science attached to this, as you would expect, and I don't intend to re-hash it here, and maybe end up unwittingly distorting the facts. Instead I have attached some links to some of the articles I have read, and you will find plenty more on the internet. Beware of websites such as sweetsurprise.com which is the PR side of The Corn Refiners Association.

Put simply though, the main points are as follows:-

Sucrose, the sugar obtained by refining beet or cane sugars, has glucose and fructose in equal measures and can be absorbed and digested by the human gut. Of itself it is not toxic to humans, although, obviously, it's intake needs to be moderate.

High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) is also made up of glucose and fructose but in unequal measures with a predominance of fructose. It is chemically manufactured by treating corn stalks (a waste product from farming) with several enzymes to manipulate the glucose found naturally in the stalks into part glucose, part fructose. Sometimes mercury is used in the process which gives rise to high levels of mercury being ingested. The resulting syrup has around 10% more fructose than its sucrose counterpart, is much sweeter and highly addictive. When we ingest HFCS, it has to be broken down by the liver and does not pass through the gut, which results in a failure to trigger insulin, amongst other things. The sugars are not metabolised successfully and the normal responses which tell us we are full, fail, leading to over-eating. The liver stores the sugars as fat which leads to on-going problems with strokes and heart disease, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. As HFCS is so addictive the rise in obesity, especially childhood obesity and diabetes is an inevitable outcome.

HFCS aids food manufacture because of its structure, and it is present in most of our food and drinks that are not made at home. The main reason that it is such a popular ingredient is that it is a fraction of the cost of refined sugar. It is present in all soft drinks that have added sugar as it mixes into a liquid more easily than refined sugar. Cakes, biscuits, frozen manufactured food, even yoghurts, crackers, pizzas and bread - pretty much anything that you buy ready prepared. Of course, if HFCS is added to savoury foods to aid production then salt is added to counteract the sweetness - a double whammy nutritionally.

When we are arguing over the Jam and Similar Products legislation in terms of altering the amount of permitted sugar for jam production, it is my belief that we should be arguing the bigger picture. As I have repeatedly said, artisanal production should be treated separately with it's own regulations. This is demonstrated by the attached table of ingredients from the 'leading' brands.

My own Trading Standards Officer has said *'High Fructose Corn Syrup is exactly what it says and shouldn't be declared as sugar on any food label. Glucose-fructose is sufficient for an ingredient on a food label and therefore a product can be labelled with those ingredients. All consumers would take from that is that the product is not sugar, in it's usual form.'*

I do not wish to be judgemental but I am not so sure that the consumer is that savvy.

I also do not know at what point HFCS is deemed to have changed into sugar to be counted as part of the sugar solids declaration on the label for jam. Currently jam has to contain a minimum reading of 60% sugar solids to be called jam - does HFCS contribute to this reading even if it is not deemed to be sugar?

We have laws about cigarette smoking with age limits controlling the sale of tobacco goods, and we have been extensively educated about its dangers.

We have laws about alcohol sale and we have had similar levels of education and controls over who it can be sold to. We are also aware of the burden the mis-use of either substance places on the NHS.

Not one human being needs tobacco or alcohol to sustain life.

However, we all need food to live - it isn't a lifestyle choice - yet for some reason, probably rooted in cash, governments, health professionals, the food standards agency, and scientists, systematically turn a blind eye to the inclusion of this toxic substance present in even the most basic food that we feed to our children on a daily basis. A sector of society who cannot make an informed choice about their nutrition and who deserve better. It is even present in some baby formula milk, pre-disposing the very youngest to a lifetime's addiction.

The population at large have not been educated with the risks, nor are there warnings on packets. The issues are probably felt to be too widespread and endemic to be tackled? Or is it fear of the food giants who control the market place?

Two million adults in our population in UK - that's 3.33% - are deemed obese enough to warrant fat reducing and potentially life-threatening surgery. **3.33%**.

£millions are spent on treating obesity, heart disease and diabetes - and the resulting misery - but the root cause is never examined or legislated for. Why?

In all of history the sugar in jams and preserves have never given rise to these problems - I just don't think it would be possible to eat enough jam! Why make jams and preserves the scapegoat now?

The debate needs to begin - and FAST.