

# SOFT DRINKS, HARD SELL

How soft drink companies target  
children and their parents

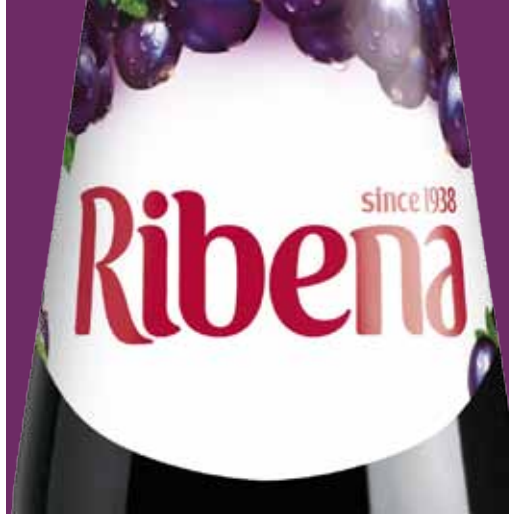


**Children's Food Campaign**

# SOFT DRINKS, HARD SELL

How soft drink companies target children and their parents

Researched and written by  
Clare Panjwani and  
Christine Haigh  
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The **Children's Food Campaign** wants to improve children's health and well-being through better food - and food teaching - in schools, and protecting children from junk food marketing. We are supported by over 150 national organisations. The Campaign is coordinated by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming.

For more information, see:  
[www.childrensfood.org.uk](http://www.childrensfood.org.uk)

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# Introduction

## Thirsty Britain

In 2010, UK consumption of soft drinks<sup>1</sup> grew by 4.1 per cent to reach 14.6 billion litres<sup>2</sup>. This means that the average person now consumes 234 litres per year<sup>3</sup> or 642ml per day: the equivalent of almost two standard (330ml) cans. As a result the soft drinks sector grew by 5.8 per cent that year, to become a £13.9 billion industry, the fastest annual rate of growth in the last seven years<sup>4</sup>. “An affordable antidote to consumers’ financial woes” is how Britvic explains the growing popularity of soft drinks and the industry’s apparent immunity to the current economic climate<sup>5</sup>.

## Marketing tactics

In an attempt to maintain this level of growth, manufacturers have been investing heavily in their products and their marketing. Tactics to persuade consumers to increase their spending on soft drinks include new flavours, reformulation (for example with less sugar or more fruit), health and nutrition claims, rebranding and repackaging. Health in particular is a big issue for consumers and manufacturers are responding. Across the industry, moves are being made to bring sugar-free variants to the market and to remove artificial colours and flavourings from existing products<sup>6</sup>.

In the run up to and throughout the summer, soft drink marketing campaigns increase, because every degree increase in temperature above 14°C gives a 2-5 per cent boost to soft drink sales<sup>7</sup>. The school summer holidays are also an important sales opportunity<sup>8</sup>, so sales drives include many products and marketing messages aimed at children and their parents. As parents are particularly influenced by the nutritional content of drinks, campaigns often focus on health benefits, the 'natural' content of the product, or the absence of ingredients which are perceived as unhealthy or unnatural.



## Children's diet and health

In common with many rich countries, the UK is suffering from an obesity epidemic and is already the fattest in Europe.<sup>9</sup> The latest figures from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) show that by the end of primary school (age 10-11), 33.6 per cent of children are overweight or obese, with these figures continuing to rise.<sup>10</sup> Alarming, the previous Government-commissioned Foresight report predicted that if no action was taken, 60 per cent of men, 50 per cent of women and 25 per cent of children would be obese by 2050.<sup>11</sup>

The ultimate consequences of obesity are increased rates of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and a host of other serious illnesses - a high cost to both an individual's health and well-being, and the national economy. It is already estimated that there are approximately 70,000 premature deaths each year in the UK as a result of an unhealthy diet.<sup>12</sup>

Even if an unhealthy diet does not result in weight gain, frequent sugar consumption contributes to tooth decay, and often displaces more nutritious foods from the diet. Data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey published in 2000<sup>13</sup> revealed that 86 per cent of children consumed more sugar than is recommended.

Although the Diet and Nutrition Survey published in 2010<sup>14</sup> does not present the data in sufficient detail to determine equivalent figures, it is still clear that the average child continues to consume too much sugar.

Soft drinks are often high in calories and sugar, and regular consumption of soft drinks is linked to childhood obesity and tooth decay<sup>15</sup>. But there is increasing concern that sugar-free drinks may also lead to weight gain. Evidence suggests that artificial sweeteners encourage dependence on and craving for sugar precisely because they are sweet<sup>16, 17</sup>. In other words, regularly eating artificial sweeteners may indirectly result in weight gain by maintaining a preference for sweet items in the diet.

In addition, certain artificial sweeteners have been linked to health concerns. For example, although deemed safe for human consumption by the UK Food Standards Agency, aspartame continues to be a controversial additive, with the European Commission recently asking the European Food Safety Authority to bring forward a full re-evaluation of the safety of aspartame<sup>18</sup>. The US food watchdog, the Centre for Science in the Public Interest, has raised concerns about the safety of another sweetener, Acesulfame K, claiming it has not been sufficiently tested despite studies linking it to cancer in rats<sup>19</sup>.

## What should children be drinking?

The independent nutrition charity the Caroline Walker Trust states: “The best drinks to offer children and young people between meals are water and milk. It is best to avoid sipping fizzy drinks, squashes, fruit drinks and fruit juices throughout the day as these drinks can damage teeth, particularly by causing tooth erosion. Diet drinks or sugar-free drinks can also damage teeth as they may be acidic and erode the dental enamel. Fruit drinks are often mistaken for fresh fruit juices but are usually predominantly water and sugar with small amounts of fruit juice and added vitamin C and sometimes other vitamins. These drinks are as harmful to teeth as other sweetened drinks”<sup>20</sup>.

The NHS Choices website offers the following advice: “Water is the healthiest choice for quenching your thirst at any time. It has no calories and contains no sugars that can damage teeth. Soft drinks can cause tooth decay and most contain very few nutrients. They can also be filling. This could reduce your child’s appetite for foods that contain the nutrients they need. The best drinks to give children are water, milk and milkshakes without added sugar. If your child drinks fruit juice it’s better to limit it to mealtimes. When you buy fruit juice, check the labels carefully and choose 100 per cent fruit juice with no added sugar. These drinks count as one of your 5 a day. Watch out for ‘juice drinks’, which can contain as little as 5 per cent fruit juice and a lot of added sugar, and do not count as one of your 5 a day.”<sup>21 22</sup>

## This report

Given this context, the Children's Food Campaign conducted a survey of this summer’s soft drink marketing campaigns that are likely to appeal to children and their parents. We compared the products with their marketing messages, across a range of brands, and found that in several cases, companies were using misleading marketing to sell more soft drinks to children.

# What we did

In June and July 2011, we conducted a survey of soft drink marketing, looking at examples of outdoor and television advertising, company websites, point of sale marketing and coverage in the trade press. The following examples are largely typical of the type of marketing used, but were chosen for this report because we considered that they were particularly misleading.

## Example 1

# Fruit Shoot Hydro: better than water?

## Marketing strategy

Media	Cinema, TV, online and press advertising, in-store and point of sale <sup>23</sup> .
Marketing budget	£2.5m <sup>24</sup>
Campaign strapline	Hydro up!
Ad	Features a child skateboarding in the style of a computer game. The ad opens with a voice-over: "Warning! Low hydration". The child drinks from a bottle of Fruit Shoot Hydro and successfully completes the game.
Target Audience	Children aged 7-11 <sup>25</sup> , and their parents. The cinema ads ran with films such as Hop, Rio, Winnie the Pooh, Kung Fu Panda 2, Cars 2, The Zookeeper and The Smurfs 3D <sup>26</sup> ; the multipack packaging points parents to Britvic's 'Ready for Ten' "parent powered" website <sup>27</sup> .
Packaging	Both the bottle and multipack feature images of splashes of water, with coloured splashes representing the fruit flavour. The words "thirsty", "hydrating", "hydrated", "hydration", "dehydrated" all appear at least once on the Fruit Shoot Hydro multipack packaging. The bottle has a "non-drip sports cap" and "easy grip shape".
On pack claims	Emphasis on health and natural ingredients: "sugar free", "spring water drink", "natural flavours", "no artificial flavours or colours".

## Product overview

Name	Fruit Shoot Hydro Blackcurrant
Manufacturer	Britvic
Description	Fruit flavoured, artificially-sweetened water with preservatives
Pack size	350ml
Fruit content	None
Sugar content	None
Artificial sweeteners	Yes: Aspartame, Acesulfame K.
Artificial flavourings	No
Colours	No
Preservatives	Yes: Dimethyl Dicarbonate, Potassium Sorbate
Ingredients (Fruit Shoot Hydro Blackcurrant)	Spring Water (99.6%), Citric Acid, Acidity Regulator (Sodium Citrate), Natural Blackcurrant Flavouring, Preservatives (Dimethyl Dicarbonate, Potassium Sorbate), Sweeteners (Aspartame, Acesulfame K), Antioxidant (Ascorbic Acid). Contains a source of Phenylalanine



## Marketing mismatch: our analysis

### Playing on concerns about dehydration

The message to children is that they should drink Fruit Shoot Hydro to keep hydrated and to perform well. To parents, the message is that children are prone to dehydration and their well-being is at risk without adequate fluid. On Britvic's Ready for Ten website which is promoted on the Fruit Shoot Hydro multipack packaging, a company nutritionist claims that "water can sometimes satisfy [children's] thirst before they are actually properly hydrated, whereas squash and juice are absorbed more slowly so they will drink more"<sup>28</sup>. The Children's Food Campaign contacted the company to ask for the scientific evidence to support the claims. After several requests by phone, email and via the company's website, we received a brief response from Britvic, which, despite our specific request, failed to provide us with robust evidence to support the claim. We are concerned that this unsatisfactory response indicates a lack of evidence for this claim, and have therefore made a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority about this.

The Children's Food Campaign believes that this claim is misleading and is likely to encourage parents to view Fruit Shoot Hydro and other Fruit Shoot products as a superior alternative to water, despite expert public health advice that water is best. As Marion Nestle, Professor of Nutrition at New York University, commented: "Water is hydrating. Adding sugar may encourage kids to drink more but the more things that go into drinks, the more water it takes to excrete them. File this under 'marketing hype'."<sup>29</sup>

In addition, sugar-free claims feature prominently on the drink's packaging but, as noted above, recent evidence suggests artificial sweeteners also have links to obesity, and safety concerns remain.



Froot Shoot Hydro TV ad still

### A healthy option?

Fruit Shoot Hydro is described on-pack as a "sugar-free, still spring water drink<sup>30</sup> with natural flavour with sweeteners", and the name of the range ("Fruit Shoot") implies fruit content. The sports-style bottle and non-drip sports cap contribute to a healthy, active image. However, this is a product that contains no fruit (only "natural fruit flavouring" which makes up less than 0.4 per cent of the ingredients), is sweet tasting, and contains additives and preservatives. We therefore consider that it is misleading to promote Fruit Shoot Hydro as a healthy drink.

*"Robinsons Fruit Shoot Hydro meets a gap in the market for older children who have become more active and, as a result, increasingly need to stay hydrated"*

Debby Eddy, Robinsons brand controller<sup>32</sup>

*"Water can sometimes satisfy their [children's] thirst before they are actually properly hydrated, whereas squash and juice are absorbed more slowly so they will drink more."*

Julie Dean, Fruit Shoot nutritionist<sup>31</sup>

# Still Vimto: raspberry content only 0.1 per cent

## Marketing strategy

Media	TV, radio and press advertising, with digital campaign across key teen websites, Facebook and other forms of social media <sup>33</sup> .
Marketing budget	£5 million - a 25 per cent increase in the company's marketing investment from 2010 <sup>34</sup>
Campaign strapline	"Seriously mixed up fruit"
Ad	Three fruit characters - a raspberry, a grape and a blackcurrant - drive around a US-style street scene in a beaten-up car. They pull up to a set of traffic lights, trying to impress some girls in another car. The car bounces around so much that the fruit are thrown together and explode into fruit juice, splattering the girls, who taste it and look impressed.
Target Audience	Designed to "increase relevance to key groups, with teenagers providing the biggest opportunity for growth" <sup>35</sup> .
Packaging (Still Vimto <sup>36</sup> )	New sporty bottle with sports cap, designed "to emphasise fruit content" <sup>37</sup> .
On pack claims	"Mixed fruit juice drink", "no artificial colours", "made with the secret Vimto flavour".

## Product overview

Name	Still Vimto
Manufacturer	Nichols
Description	Sugar- and artificially-sweetened drink with fruit juice, preservatives and flavourings.
Pack size	500ml <sup>38</sup>
Fruit content	5 per cent fruit juice from concentrate (equivalent to 25ml or 5 teaspoons per 500ml bottle). The raspberry content contributes 0.1 per cent volume (0.5ml), blackcurrant juice 0.5 per cent (2.5ml), and grape juice 4.4 per cent (22ml) <sup>39</sup> .
Sugar content	Total sugars 6.5g per 100ml. Added sugar greater than fruit content.
Artificial sweeteners	Yes: Acesulfame K, Sucralose
Artificial flavourings	Yes. The Children's Food Campaign asked Vimto whether the 'secret Vimto flavour' listed on the packaging included artificial ingredients. A spokesperson replied that the flavour includes "a complex mix involving tinctures of herbs and spices as well as extracts of fruits and totalling more than 20 ingredients. Among this there are a very few compounds that cannot be economically sourced as natural ingredients and for those ingredients we therefore have to use manufactured compounds, though they are chemically identical to the compounds found in nature." <sup>40</sup>
Colours	Yes: Anthocyanins, which are a group of red-blue plant pigments <sup>41</sup> . Colouring the water can suggest a higher concentration of fruit juice.
Preservatives	Yes: Dimethyl Dicarbonate, Sodium Benzoate, Potassium Sorbate
Ingredients (Still Vimto)	Water, Sugar, Fruit Juices from Concentrate 5% (Grape, Blackcurrant, Raspberry), Vimto Flavouring (including Natural Extracts of Fruits, Herbs, Barley Malt and Spices), Citric Acid, Natural Colour (Anthocyanins), Antioxidant (Ascorbic Acid), Preservatives (Dimethyl Dicarbonate, Sodium Benzoate, Potassium Sorbate), Acidity Regulator (Sodium Citrate), Sweeteners: Acesulfame K, Sucralose).

## Marketing mismatch: our analysis

### Raspberry features prominently in the marketing but is present at only 0.1 per cent

The lead character in the ad is a raspberry, and the packaging shows pictures of raspberries. Yet the 500ml bottle contains just five teaspoons of fruit juice (25ml) and of this only ten drops are raspberry (0.5ml). The proportion of the different fruit juices in the product is not given on the product packaging and instead would require a consumer to search online or contact the manufacturer.<sup>42</sup> At such a low level, the raspberry content cannot contribute significantly to Vimto's taste, appearance or nutritional value. Yet the raspberry's dominance over the other fruits on Vimto's packaging and in its advertising campaign, despite the fact that the product contains less raspberry juice than the other fruit juices, suggests that the manufacturer believes that the raspberry content of Vimto will help sell more of this product. We consider that its prominent use to promote the product is misleading.

### Packaging misleadingly suggests significant fruit content

The implied message to parents and children is that Vimto contains significant amounts of fruit. The pictures of fruit, the "seriously mixed up fruit" slogan and the colour of the drink all suggest this.



Vimto TV ad still

Research conducted by Vimto among the brand's core target audience showed that "the new 'splash' design increases the message that Vimto is refreshing, emphasises fruit content which, in turn, better communicates Vimto's taste". The research also showed that teens would be 65 per cent more likely to purchase Vimto in the new sportscap bottle (pictured) compared to the previous design<sup>43</sup>. Yet the fruit content of the drink is just five per cent.

*"Dynamic V-shaped Splash design increases the message that Vimto is refreshing, emphasises fruit content which, in turn, better communicates Vimto's taste"<sup>44</sup>.*

Vimto Soft Drinks press release, 2011

### No indication of high sugar content

What Vimto's marketing does not convey is the sugar content, despite this being greater than the fruit content and second only to water. The on-pack nutritional information does include sugars, but the guideline daily amount information only gives the quantity per 250ml serving (half the 500ml bottle), which may mislead some consumers.

# Ribena Blackcurrant squash: a natural source of vitamin C?

## Marketing strategy

Media	TV advertising, plus a nationwide outdoor advertising and online campaign in May to support the launch of Ribena Sparkling <sup>45</sup> .
Marketing budget	£2.3m for the TV campaign, part of the brand's planned £11m marketing spend in 2011 <sup>46</sup> .
Campaign strapline	"Bursting with berryness"
Ad	Animation of countryside scene where blackcurrant characters do everything they can to propel themselves into a farmer's trailer, labelled "British blackberries", going to "Ribena Farm" so they can be made into Ribena. The final shot shows a picnic scene with a pitcher and glass of the product alongside a bottle of Ribena squash and a sign reading "Your daily dose of vitamin C".
Target Audience	The campaign "aims to re-establish a connection with mothers" <sup>47</sup> .
Packaging	Images of large blackcurrant fruits and leaves and purple-coloured drink.
On pack claims	"Rich in vitamin C"; "made from British blackcurrants"; "no artificial colours, flavours or sweeteners"; "contains real fruit juice".

## Product overview

Name	Ribena Blackcurrant squash <sup>48</sup>
Manufacturer	GlaxoSmithKline
Description	Available in 600ml, 1 litre and 2 litre bottles (undiluted).
Pack size	Sugar-sweetened dilutable blackcurrant squash containing fruit juice, vitamin C and preservatives.
Fruit content (after dilution)	5 per cent fruit juice from concentrate, equivalent to 12.5ml or 2.5 teaspoons per 250ml serving. Vitamin C content (total, after dilution according to manufacturer's instructions): 60mg (100 per cent RDA) per 250ml serving. It is not clear from the packaging what proportion of the drink's 100 per cent vitamin C RDA claim is attributable to the fruit content, but in an email from GlaxoSmithKline the Children's Food Campaign was told that "The vitamin C content of Ribena coming from the blackcurrants is approximately 10% and 90% comes from the addition of vitamin C." <sup>49</sup>
Sugar content	Total sugars 10.5g per 100ml diluted product. Added sugar greater than fruit content.
Artificial sweeteners	No
Artificial flavourings	No
Colours	Yes: Anthocyanins, which are a group of red-blue plant pigments <sup>50</sup> . Colouring the water can suggest a higher concentration of fruit juice.
Preservatives	Yes: Potassium Sorbate, Sodium Bisulphite
Ingredients (after dilution)	Water, Sugar, Blackcurrant Juice from Concentrate (5%), Citric Acid, Vitamin C, Preservatives (Potassium Sorbate, Sodium Bisulphite), Colour (Anthocyanins).

## Marketing mismatch: our analysis

### Your daily dose of vitamin C – but not from blackcurrants

The TV ad focuses on the fruit and vitamin C content of Ribena, emphasising the drink's health benefits. But the majority of Ribena drinks contain only around five to seven per cent fruit content; the squash product diluted according to the manufacturer's advice contains five per cent fruit juice. At this low concentration the fruit content alone cannot contribute significantly to Ribena's central marketing claim that the drink provides "your daily dose of vitamin C". Indeed, GlaxoSmithKline confirmed that 90 per cent of the vitamin C is added rather than coming from the blackcurrant juice. The packaging and advertising suggest significant fruit content and it is likely that many consumers will mistakenly assume that the vitamin C comes from the fruit. The packaging does not state "with added vitamin C" so a consumer would have to read the ingredients to deduce this.



Ribena TV ad still

### No indication of high sugar content

The total sugar content is 26g per 250ml serving, higher than the fruit content and second only to the water content. On the packaging, the sugars in a single serving are described as providing 29 per cent of an adult's guideline daily amount (GDA) of sugar. However, Ribena is widely accepted as a children's drink, and this amount of sugar would represent 31 per cent, or almost one third of a child's (aged 5-10) GDA of sugar in a single drink. This information is not provided on the packaging.

*"Our new advertising campaign responds to consumer interest in nutritional value and provenance. The Berry characters...provide an engaging and visual means of communicating the role of positive nutrition in leading a healthy lifestyle."<sup>51</sup>*

Ribena marketing director Verity Clifton

# Capri-Sun juice drink: nothing artificial, not much fruit

## Marketing strategy

Media	On-pack promotion supported by a £1million national marketing campaign including outdoor posters, additional promotions and radio advertising <sup>52</sup> .
Marketing budget	£1m for marketing to support on-pack promotion.
Promotion strapline	"The Chance To Win A Perfect Day"
Promotion	"The chance to put together the experience of a lifetime to enjoy with friends and family, with the most imaginative entry winning their Perfect Day." <sup>53</sup>
Target Audience	Teens and young adults <sup>54</sup> . Promotion ran from 1 April, "whilst teens are still at school and we're confident it will help boost soft drinks sales ahead of summer" <sup>55</sup> .
Packaging (Capri Sun juice drink <sup>56</sup> )	200ml pack features large illustration of fruit with sign reading "nothing artificial at all". Both pack sizes have a foil pack "to keep it as fresh as possible" <sup>57</sup> . Website claims that 200ml pack is "perfect for the lunchbox" <sup>58</sup> ; 330ml pack has "Resealable cap making it perfect for when you're on the go!" <sup>59</sup>
On pack claims	On 200ml single pack: "nothing artificial at all"; on 330ml single pack: "made with natural juice and no artificial ingredients!". On 200ml multipack: "freeze overnight for the perfect lunchbox cooler"; "no artificial additives or preservatives"; "no artificial sweeteners".

## Product overview

Name	Capri-Sun Juice Drink Orange
Manufacturer	Rudolf Wild GmbH (UK distributor: Coca-Cola Enterprises)
Serving size	200ml available singly and in multipacks of five and ten; 330ml available singly and in multipacks of three.
Description	Sugar-sweetened drink with fruit juice and flavouring.
Fruit content	12 per cent of which 7 per cent is orange juice from concentrate
Sugar content	Total sugars 10g per 100ml – this includes fruit and added sugars. One 200ml pack contains 20g of sugar – the equivalent of four teaspoons of sugar; the 330ml pack contains 33g or the equivalent of more than six teaspoons of sugar.
Artificial sweeteners	No
Artificial flavourings	No
Colours	No
Preservatives	No
Ingredients (Capri-Sun Juice Drink Orange)	Water, fruit juices from concentrate 12% (Orange 7%, Lemon, Acerola Cherry), sugar, natural orange flavouring.

## Marketing mismatch: our analysis

### 'Juice drink' label misleading

Large pictures of oranges feature on the product packaging, taking up almost half of the pack, and the on-pack description is "still orange juice drink". A prominent "nothing artificial at all" claim is displayed on the front of the pack. This emphasis on the fruit content and the claim of no artificial ingredients diverts the consumer's attention away from the fact that less than one-eighth of the product is fruit, and that it has significant added sugar.

*"With artificial ingredients such as sweeteners being banned from school menus, 'natural' is becoming a key trend and is the number two consideration amongst consumers when purchasing soft drinks"*

Anita Huntley, Head of Marketing at Coca-Cola Enterprises (Capri Sun UK distributor)<sup>60</sup>.



Capri Sun promotional picture

*"Imagine Your Perfect Day and Win It' is a great opportunity for retailers to take advantage of Capri-Sun's mass-market appeal and offers a great incentive for purchase with both existing and new shoppers. This exciting promotion will run from the 1st April for 12 weeks, whilst teens are still at school and we're confident it will help boost soft drinks sales ahead of summer."*

Selena Taylor, Trade Communications Manager at Coca-Cola Enterprises Ltd (Capri Sun UK distributor)<sup>61</sup>

# Conclusion and Recommendations

This report shows that the soft drinks market is a lucrative one, and companies have millions of pounds to spend on marketing their products, including to children and their parents. Unfortunately, many of these marketing messages are misleading, and we believe they are encouraging parents and children to consume drinks that contradict public health advice.

## Are ingredients the new 'small print'?

In all the examples in this report, the marketing plays on health concerns. All the products make reference to fruit - even Fruit Shoot Hydro uses the word in the name of the product, despite the fact that it doesn't contain any fruit. In those products that do contain some fruit juice (though at levels as low as five per cent in the case of the Still Vimto and Ribena squash products profiled here), the emphasis is greater, with images of fruit featuring heavily in the marketing.

The Children's Food Campaign believes that it is not unreasonable for people to expect that a product that has packaging which is covered in fruit images, is labelled as a fruit juice drink, and marketed with a focus on its fruit content, will contain significant amounts of fruit. Indeed, according to a survey by consumer body Which?, such techniques do indeed lead many consumers purchasing juice drinks to believe the drinks contain a substantial amount of fruit<sup>62</sup>.

The reality is that there is no statutory minimum amount of fruit juice that such 'fruit juice drinks' must contain, with food labelling regulation simply requiring manufacturers to state the percentage of fruit juice the product contains, while according to industry convention, juice drinks are defined as having between 5 and 25 per cent juice content.<sup>63</sup> It is disingenuous for any manufacturer to argue that a marketing campaign that misrepresents the product and misleads consumers is excusable because its fruit content is listed on an ingredients panel. We believe this is equivalent to a contract's 'small print' and is not an acceptable get-out clause.

An additional tactic employed by Ribena to give its products a healthy image is its emphasis on the vitamin C content, with its claim that a serving provides 100 per cent of the RDA of vitamin C central to its marketing. However, this occurs without any reference to the fact that, because the blackcurrant content in the squash product - once diluted according to instructions - is only five per cent, only ten per cent of the vitamin C comes from this source; the rest is added. Although 'vitamin C' is listed in the ingredients, we had to contact the manufacturer to find out exactly what proportion of vitamin C was added.

In contrast to the emphasis on fruit, no mention is made of the fact that the drinks contain added sugar even though, in the case of Still Vimto and Ribena squash, there is more added sugar than

fruit. Consumers have to scour the small-print in the ingredients list to find this information. Even then, none of the products state exactly how much sugar is added, and people will only know whether there is more added sugar than fruit if they also know that, legally, ingredients have to be listed in order, with the largest ingredients first, and so on until the smallest.

## Big name brands: big offenders in misleading marketing

One of the most misleading claims found in this research was Fruit Shoot Hydro's statement that "water can sometimes satisfy [children's] thirst before they are actually properly hydrated, whereas squash and juice are absorbed more slowly so they will drink more"<sup>64</sup>. Such claims contradict public health advice, and encourage parents to give squash and juice products to their children instead of water. Due to Britvic's failure to provide us with robust evidence to support this claim, we have complained to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) about this.

## The problem with advertising 'controls'

The ASA is an advertising industry body that oversees two advertising codes which advertisers are meant to follow. These codes are:

- The UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (BCAP Code), which covers television and radio advertising

- The UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing (CAP Code), which covers media such as cinema, press, posters and online.

According to the ASA's website, the codes are "written by the advertising industry through the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP)"<sup>65</sup>.

There are a number of problems with this system. The codes are designed to ensure that advertising is "decent, legal, honest and truthful" – not to protect and promote health. In addition, they do not cover all marketing techniques, so product packaging, for example, is not covered. The codes are vague and inconsistent, so their interpretation is very subjective. And enforcement is weak and occurs, if at all, only after the ads have appeared, giving advertisers little incentive to comply with the codes.<sup>66</sup>

As well as general rules that state advertising must be responsible, must not mislead, or offend, the advertising codes contain specific rules that cover advertising to children and certain types of products and services. The CAP code covering food and soft drinks states that: "Commercial product advertising cannot reasonably be expected to perform the same role as education and public information in promoting a varied and balanced diet but *should not undermine progress towards national dietary improvement by misleading or confusing consumers*"<sup>67</sup> (emphasis added). The codes also state that "the spirit, as well as the letter, of the rules...applies to all advertisements that promote, directly or indirectly, a food or soft drink

product”<sup>68</sup>. However, previous complaints about advertising, which we believe have clearly breached this section of the code, have not been upheld<sup>69</sup>.

By contrast, the TV advertising scheduling restrictions, overseen by Ofcom, effectively prevent the screening of advertisements for food and drink products defined as ‘less healthy’ according to the nutrient profiling model developed by the Food Standards Agency during children’s television programming. This ensures that children are not subject to advertising for such products at these times. Although this system is better, the regulation does not adequately protect children because most of their TV viewing, particularly in the case of older children, occurs outside children’s TV programming times<sup>70</sup>.

We conclude that, without strong enforcement of effective rules which protect children (and also protect the companies that stick to marketing rules from unfair competition), misleading marketing is likely to continue.

## We therefore make the following recommendations:

### **The Government should introduce robust and consistent regulatory standards to protect children from the marketing of unhealthy food and drink products**

Currently, advertisements for food and drink products defined as ‘less healthy’ according to the nutrient profiling model developed by the Food Standards Agency are not allowed to be screened during children’s television programming. While the Children’s Food Campaign welcomes this regulation, it fails to protect children during the majority of their television viewing, which does not occur during these periods. Government should therefore introduce a 9pm watershed for unhealthy food and drink products, as this would provide more effective protection for children. Similarly robust protective regulation also needs to be extended to all other marketing media, such as outdoor and online advertising.

With the exception of the Fruit Shoot Hydro product, all the products featured in this report would not be permitted to be marketed during children’s television programming because of their sugar content and lack of fruit content<sup>71</sup>. However, given research suggesting that consumption of artificial sweeteners (such as those used in the Fruit Shoot Hydro products) may have health risks, including contributing to obesity, we recommend that **the Government should take a precautionary approach and instruct Ofcom to add artificially sweetened products to the food and drinks not permitted to be advertised to children.**

### **The Government should recommend that all food manufacturers use a consistent form of colour-coded front-of-pack nutritional labelling**

Currently, many companies use some form of front of pack nutrition labelling to help consumers identify healthier products. Most have adopted a version of either the traffic light labelling system developed by the Food Standards Agency (for example Sainsbury’s) or the percentage guideline daily amount (GDA)

system (for example Unilever). In an independent review for the Food Standards Agency, published in 2009, it was recommended that a hybrid scheme, incorporating both systems, be adopted by all companies to provide clear and consistent information for people<sup>72</sup>. A number of companies (such as Asda and McCain) already use such a system, but there remains a confusing variety of different schemes in operation in the UK market. Government should recommend that all companies use a colour-coded front-of-pack labelling scheme. If this was the case, the manufacturers of Vimto, Ribena and Capri Sun would give a colour code for sugars and allow people to see clearly the sugar content, including whether most of these sugars were from fruit (in which case the colour code for sugar would be amber) or whether there was a significant quantity of added sugars (in which case the colour code would be red)<sup>73</sup>.

### **The Government should ensure that the food-based and nutrient-based standards for school food are maintained, and extended to academies and free schools**

Currently, under the school food standards for England, which cover all drinks served in schools, none of the drinks featured in this report would be allowed to be served. Under the standards, water must be served unsweetened and unflavoured, and only a limited number of other types of drinks are permitted. Fruit or vegetable juices may only be served pure, or mixed with water, milk, yogurt or a plain soya-, rice- or oat-drink. Only dairy-, soya-, rice- or oat-drinks may contain added sug-

ars or honey, up to a maximum of five per cent. These standards ensure that the food and drink children receive at school contribute towards a healthy diet. However, academies and free schools established since May 2010 are not required to meet these standards, leaving open the possibility that pupils at these schools will be able to consume less healthy drinks while at school, and undermining the intention of the standards to ensure that all food and drink provided in state-maintained schools would contribute to children's health. The Government should therefore extend the standards to cover these schools.

### **Local authorities should ensure that drinking water is available in parks and other public places**

Water is the healthiest drink available, and can be provided free of charge from the tap, without generating waste from packaging or consuming energy for transportation. Drinking fountains in public places can enable people to drink tap water when they are away from home, and remove the need to purchase soft drinks to quench their thirst. Drinking fountains can be installed at very modest cost, and cost virtually nothing to maintain, whilst also reducing the costs of waste collection and disposal, and contributing to improved public health. Recently a number of local authorities, including the City of London and the London Borough of Lambeth, have recognised these benefits and installed new fountains. The Children's Food Campaign would like to see water fountains installed in all public places, particularly parks where children are most like to congregate and play.

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# SOFT DRINKS, HARD SELL

How soft drink companies target  
children and their parents

August 2011

**The Children's Food Campaign** wants to improve young people's health and well-being through better food – and food teaching – in schools and by protecting children from junk food marketing. We are supported by over 150 national organisations and thousands of concerned people. The Children's Food Campaign is coordinated by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming; for more information see [www.childrensfood.org.uk](http://www.childrensfood.org.uk)

The Children's Food Campaign is coordinated by **Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming**, a registered charity which advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture, and promote equity. It represents around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level.



Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming  
94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF  
Tel: 020 7837 1228  
[sustain@sustainweb.org](mailto:sustain@sustainweb.org)  
[www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

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