

# 14 About Eating and Dietary Habits in Science-fiction Films. The Restaurant at the End of the Universe

*Frans Meulenbergh, Henk Maassen*

The Restaurant at the End of the Universe is one of the most extraordinary ventures in the entire history of catering. It has been built on the fragmented remains of... it will be built on the fragmented... that is to say it will have been built by this time, and indeed has been...

(Douglas Adams)

The beautiful Celeste is 1296 years old, and comes from a planet at 92 light years from Earth. She visits our planet on a secret mission and thinks she is well prepared. She has learned all sorts of encyclopaedic knowledge about man and his customs off by heart. Man is scarcely technologically developed, compared to her planet, which is 55 centuries ahead. So it can hardly be difficult to be well prepared. She crashes on a party and immediately attracts attention with her strange behaviour about food. She eats a cigarette stub as if it was a delicious snack ('thank you, delicious'), takes a carrot and lights it like a cigar and asks for spinach as she sings Popeye's song. Celeste soon realises she seems to be blundering and complains to her boss: 'The food is all wrong!' No wonder, for earthly habits are considerably different from hers. She swallows small batteries and slurps the contents out of larger batteries to get energy. She gradually learns, but still she gets it very wrong from time to time. In order to prepare a breakfast for earthly beloved and his daughter, she steals a menu card from a restaurant, and cooks everything on it. Enough cakes, pancakes, loaves, roast chicken, juices, waffles, hamburgers, and cheeseburgers for quite a few entire families. Even the dog looks puzzled when he is given six overflowing bowls of dog food.

Celeste Martin (Kim Basinger) is one of the lead figures in the film *My Stepmother is an Alien* (1988). The food is not the only difference between her planet and the customs on Earth. On her planet there is peace, no war, and no sex. Procreation is arranged through Petri-dishes, an admission that elicits the cynical response from her lover: 'O, like in Switzerland!' She takes her decision to stay on Earth indefinitely after eating the most delicious thing ever, according to her: 'Rye bread with ham and cheese, plus mayonnaise!'

## Film as a Source of Knowledge

Good films and good literature often take the form of a mental experiment. This most certainly applies to science-fiction, that is continually beset by the prejudice that it is an 'inferior' genre, that most culture lovers look down on. This is not fair. What will we eat in the future? How do our dietary habits compare with extraterrestrials? What does this say about mankind, the extraterrestrials and the relationship between the two? In this chapter we will present a short reading of remarkable, bizarre, humorous and though provoking food scenes from science-fiction films.

Why should we concern ourselves with films? Films are only amusement, some might say. However, that is not really the case. Each one of us must work out how we want to live our life and on what moral basis, what kind of person we wish to be. We do so gradually, and daily experience is an excellent aid. For instance, intimate relationships give form and meaning to our lives. Relationships are building blocks for who and what we are and want to be. The birth of a child, the illness of a relative, the shared history of good friends: all this gives new insights, a better and more adequate take on life and the role we play there.

'Real' experience is an important source of moral attitude, but it can never be the only source. Reflection alone is not enough for adult morals, simply because there is so much we never experience at first hand: hunger, murder, child abuse, animal experiments, war or dictatorship. We have a judgement on it all, but we have not necessarily experienced it. Or, to give an example in the culinary domain; without being Hannibal Lector (from the film *The Silence of the Lambs*) we have a judgement on cannibalism. So we need other sources in order to make our judgements. To what extent might film – or literature, or the stage – help us? Films give us detailed images, penetrating descriptions of lives and characters, and the complexity of it. Films are indeed food for moral contemplation. They achieve this by pointing out the subtleties involved in matters that deserve our attention, films sharpen our capacity to distinguish moral nuances. Stories that teach us understanding, refer to what it is 'really about' to use the words of the American philosopher Anthony Cunningham. Film feeds the moral fibre, gives understanding, shows up nuances, sharpens, softens, and whatever else. Apart from the capacity to move us, film has moral strength and is a source of knowledge.



## Traitorous Food

Apart from Celeste Martin, another, far more famous, extraterrestrial visited our planet: E.T. He cannot go unmentioned, despite the fact that he scarcely eats in the film. But when his friend Eliot goes off to school after hiding E.T., E.T. goes exploring. He opens the well stocked American fridge. He first takes out a potato salad, but doesn't think much to that. Then he opens a can of beer and drinks thirstily. A few more cans follow. Because of the symbiotic relationship between Eliot and E.T., Eliot starts to burp in the class room and look rather dazed.

Obviously, science fiction is concerned with the future. Often, there is a dystopic vision. Consider the world as we greet it in *Demolition Man*, set in the year 2032. Los Angeles and surroundings are totally destroyed in 2012, and a new, utopic society has risen out of its ashes. There is peace and order. Crime and murder are no longer known in the town. The police agents have become unaccustomed to criminals. Granted, there are rebels, the 'Scraps' living under the ground in the remains of the old towns, but generally they do not bother anyone. They live on meals of 'rat burgers' and occasionally come into the sunshine to find food other than rats. But is it such a utopian future? Alcohol, sex, meat and other unhealthy food has been banned by the government. There is only one restaurant, named Taco Bell. How on earth can a cook make something tasty without cheese, salt or fat?

How far will we go for something tasty? A long way, apparently. In *The Matrix* a computer hacker, Neo, discovers that the 1999 reality is actually a virtual world created by a distant future, but it is hard to step out of it. Neo joins the rebel leader Morpheus who opens his eyes: 'Welcome to the desert of the real'. The rebels live a sober life as they fight the developers of the matrix. Food plays an important secondary role in the film. A simple meal, consisting mainly of noodles, and cutlery ('there is no spoon') serves as an example for Morpheus to explain how the Matrix works: our reality is merely a computer simulation, the 'real' world is barren and fragile. One of the rebels, Cypher, betrays his companions for a very simple reason: he wants to taste a real steak, in the Matrix. A virtual steak prompts him to choose the role of the traitor. It also raises the question: how does a virtual steak taste, when you know it is virtual? Cypher is well aware of this dilemma.

At a more detailed level, we see mostly muckiness in the future. In the animation film *Futurama* a pizza courier named Fry accidentally gets frozen in, in 1999 and defrosts on new year's eve 2999. He discovers there that the secret ingredient of his favourite drink is... the droppings of a green worm. In another memorable food scene, he is eating bread with egg, full of parasites. There is a nice supporting role for a robot who is addicted to drinks and fat cigars.

The Thermians studied the series so thoroughly, that they even prepare the favourite meals of the actors/astronauts: a dish from their home countries, which is a problem for the actor who played an alien in the series (a pastiche of Mr Spock in *Star Trek*). He is served a soup full of foreign, and live, insects. The captain is given special attention: 'We have enjoyed preparing many of your esoteric dishes. Your *Monte Christo* sandwich is a current favourite among the adventurous.'

## Vegetable Plot in Space

In *Silent Running*, the earth has become a monotonous biotope, where the same 24°C reigns everywhere and 'nature' as we know it has disappeared, and progress has come to an end. Fukuyama's end of history is finally a fact: there is no disease or adversity any more. The price is high: beauty and imagination, curiosity and entrepreneurial spirit have died. That at least, is the opinion of the astronaut Lowell, who lives in a large spaceship near Saturn with a few companions. Their spaceship is one of a fleet, whose task is to maintain the remains of 'real' nature in a sort of biospheres. Because there is also livestock on board, you could see this spaceship as a 'spacey' variation on the Noah's Arc story. The astronauts are only too pleased to be ordered back home. The powers that be on earth no longer see the point of that sort of spatial 'nature conservation'. The astronauts had already lost faith some time ago.

But Lowell resists. He frees himself from the fleet and blows up his companions. He has always despised them as barbarians, eating synthetic food and living a life cut off from nature. Lowell himself harvests and eats 'natural' vegetables: melons and leeks. In the end, Lowell 'the last ecologist' finds himself in a paradoxical situation: there is not a living soul left – although there are two mechanical friends, the robots Huey and Dewy – but there is a beautiful, natural paradise, although that starts to fade a little in the end. When he finally blows himself up, there is one biosphere left. It is tended by a robot, somewhere deep in the galaxy, the earthly nature flourishes. But no one will enjoy her fruits, robots don't need to eat.

## People Eat People

The rather pompous *Soylent Green* tells the tale of a post-apocalyptic world, a Malthusian terror where over population, pollution and greenhouse effects have depleted the natural resources of man. In the year 2022 New York numbers 40 million souls. Only the upper classes can occasionally afford fruit, vegetable or steak – the masses must make do with the synthetic products made by the company Soylent. In particular the nutritious Soylent Green, believed to be made from oceanic plankton, is popular. In one scene, the main protagonists – an old man who can remember the 'good old days' and



## Earthly Habits in 'Outer Space'

In *Star Trek* (both the television series and the films) each member of the crew on board has their own 'replicator', a sort of vending machine. The desired meals materialise in the replicator, according to the individual's taste and wishes. Exactly as well cooked and as warm as one desires. In addition, there is a fairly ordinary restaurant or canteen on board. But sometimes technique fails them. In the *Voyager* season the crew cannot use the replicator due to serious energy problems on board. The supplies officer, Neelix, takes on the role of amateur cook. In the beginning his efforts are barely edible, but he perseveres and proves creative. He is continually trying out new recipes, borrowed from the strange cultures the crew meet on their journey through the universes. And when he has had enough of that for a while, he tries to make something palatable with what he has in his own vegetable plot. In the next series *Next Generation*, captain Picard clings to his earthly habits and enjoys a cup of Earl Grey tea and two cigars in the afternoon. It is not the only habit they have taken with them. In the *Deep Space Nine* season – no longer devoted to a space shuttle but on a space station – a dwarf runs an ordinary bar and serves light meals.

The series and the films lead to *The Star Trek Cookbook*, running to over three hundred pages, with hundreds of recipes, suitable for Klingons, Bajorans, Vulcans and humans. The recipes vary from 'Captain Kirk's Piomeek Soup' over 'Vulcan Apple Pastry' to 'Klingon Bloodwine'. It gives the impression of being more a spin-off of a clever marketing campaign rather than a useful addition to the number of recipes available in the distant future. The two part cookbook that accompanied the *Star Wars* films is of a similar concept.

## 'Never Give up, Never Surrender'

For *Star Trek* fans ('Trekkies') *Galaxy Quest* is a staple. This film is a hilarious parody of the numerous conventions in the *Star Trek* series. A number of actors who once figured in the extremely popular series *Galaxy Quest* is still making the most of their old glory, even twenty years on. They 'perform' at SF conventions and in ordinary commercials. The actors think they are about to perform in yet another commercial, when they find themselves on a real spaceship manned by representatives of the planet Thermia, engaged in a heavy battle with the sinister 'baddie' Sarris. On Thermia, light years away from earth, where the series *Galaxy Quest* was broadcasted, the Thermians regard the series as 'historical chronicles'. As if it were undiluted truth. A moment where 'fiction' replaces 'reality'. They call on the help of the crew from *Galaxy Quest*, who whisper desperately to one another 'we're actors, not astronauts'. They have no choice and enter the fight with Sarris, under the old adage of the series 'Never give up. Never surrender.' Cliché on cliché follows, sprinkled with *camp*-like humour.



his younger friend, a policeman, who knows nothing of nature and natural food – both get ‘real food’ to eat for the first time in ages. It proves to be a disconcerting experience for both of them. Salivating, they enjoy the delicious meal. It will prove to be a sort of last supper for both of them.

Older people and others who are tired of living under these awful conditions, can report for euthanasia, where they listen to their favourite music and are surrounded by lovely images of bountiful natural beauty, as they exchange the temporary for the eternal. The old man joins such a euthanasia clinic. The police agent meanwhile discovers the gruesome secret of Soy lent. The bodies the euthanasia clinic ‘produces’ are worked into Soy lent Green. For that much reputed protein rich plankton no longer exists, the seas are quite dead. Mortally wounded and chased by his adversaries, the agent wants to make his terrible discovery known. But will anyone listen?

In the sinister French film *Delicatessen* there is definitely an audience, a whole underground brigade who dispossess the heroes by the end of the film. The film is set in a vague time set. The reddish brown shades the film is made in might as well refer to France in the fifties as to the post apocalyptic version of the country in the distant future. Whenever, it is a country where people live amid destruction and in ruins.

Without a doubt, the most eccentric figure is Clapet, a butcher and landlord. Times are bad for butchers, meat is scarce. But cannibalism offers a way out. With a certain regularity, Clapet places an advertisement for a handyman. He really does some odd jobs, but after a while he is run through the meat-mincer. The last handyman to be ‘employed’ by Clapet, but this time there is a complication: the former clown falls in love with Clapet’s daughter. That complicates matters.

Even in this absurd, surreal world there appears to be some justice and liberation. An underground, vegetarian movement is fighting against the common cannibalism, and will help to save the two lovers. The barbarian butcher will die a terrible death, he gets a knife in his forehead.

*Delicatessen* is called a dystopia, but it is not, it is more of a twisted fairy tale, for it has a happy end.

## Eggs Laid in a Human Body

After a few months of ‘hypersleep’, a group of crew members awake on the spaceship *Nostromo*, in the film *Alien*. They are on their way to earth, but halfway through their return journey they pick up a signal that needs investigation. The first thing they do on waking up is have breakfast with coffee and cereals (cornflakes and other breakfast cereals). After the investigation into the unknown planet (whereby one of them encounters an alien), they eat together before going back into hypersleep. All seems well, even with the man who was attacked. However, during the meal, the alien breaks out of the chest of the poor man. It is a sort of crablike creature who lays eggs in a human



body, like a parasite, which grow super fast into a creature that claws its way out of the chest.

## Floating Reclining Chairs

*WALL-E* is a rather cute and cheerful rubbish robot. He was left on earth in 2075 to clear up the mess on earth made by the customers of the super-supermarket *Buy N Large*. Seven hundred years later he is still busy sorting, compression and piling up all the mess. He has piled up his rubbish cubes to skyscraper height. Everything else on earth seems to have died, apart from a stubborn grass hopper. His only fun is to watch the film *Hello Dolly* over and over again. *WALL-E*'s quiet life is disturbed when the super cool robot Eve is dropped on earth. She is looking for something and just when she has made friends with *WALL-E* she finds what she was looking for: a plant. She is collected by the space shuttle, and sentimental *WALL-E* follows her.

The plant proves the key to everything. Eve goes to a space station that belongs to *Buy N Large*, where humankind has been temporarily – for centuries – housed. Since leaving earth, people stay in the spaceship and do nothing other than eat, drink and watch television. They move around in floating reclining chairs. They seem to have become the ultimate consumer. They do not think and consume whatever they are presented with. They are fat, shapeless figures, their bones have shrunk, they scarcely have muscles to move with. They are totally dependent on the computers that serve them. Is this the hard lesson for the young watchers? Boys and girls, this is your future? No. After all sorts of complications, the degenerate people can return to earth. Do they dream of the earth they left behind? With skyscrapers, enormous shopping malls and mountains of rubbish? No, of course not. They dream of an romantic America where the farmer sows his fields by hand and everyone enjoys *Hello Dolly*!

## A Guide to the Galaxy

What is the first thing a polite extraterrestrial does when he lands on earth? He wants to shake hands with a car because he thinks this is the dominant form of life on earth. If he had had a hitchhiker's guide he would have known better and offered his hand to an insect. For we might think we are the top of the evolutionary chain, for the extraterrestrial backpacker man is just one of the many life forms in the universe. Insignificant even, for at the beginning of the film version of the hilarious cult book *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* earth must make way for an intergalactic highway. What follows is a range of absurd jokes about logic. There is the joke about the fish of Babel and the proof of God's existence that is carried to extremes. It goes like this: you put the Babel-fish in your ear so that you can understand all the languages of the

universe. Philosophers found it so incredible that something so useful as the fish of Babel was developed incidentally, that they decide it must be the product of creation. This then gives them the ultimate proof that God does not exist. For, in making the fish of Babel, God has made His existence known, so that no one needs to believe in Him anymore. Without faith He is powerless, as He has declared often Himself. So He ceases to exist.

As far as the travellers are concerned, they have only one goal in their journey, which is to reach the most exceptional restaurant in world history: the restaurant at the end of the universe. Where pigs may talk and want nothing better than to be eaten.

## Reflection

The genre determines the vision on the future society – reaching far beyond our milky way – and what place food and eating habits have there. Sometimes the vision is mild – in feel good movies like *E.T.* and, to a lesser extent, *Wall-E*. At the other end of the spectrum, we find the raw, dystopic films such as *Soylent Green*. So it is the genre that determines the mildness or the hardness of the vision on the future. While one genre seeks to fill us with wonder and awe, the other seeks to make us shudder in abhorrence by painting an utterly dismal picture of the future.

There are science-fiction films who pay no attention at all to food, such as *Gattaca*. Where the theme is taken up, there is little room for optimism. The callous attitude man takes to his planet comes at a high price. The dystopic visions of the future make clear that the present treatment of the earth will lead to its logical conclusion: nature will be destroyed, natural resources will be totally depleted (*Demolition Man*, *Soylent Green*, *Wall-E*). In a few cases our whole existence is no more than a large computer trick of the imagination (*The Matrix*). With it comes an end to human attributes such as beauty, imagination, pleasure, and entrepreneurial drive (*Silent Running*). The natural link – perhaps an intimate connection – between man and food is cut through, with a blunt and ragged knife.

An oft-heard complaint about modern, western food culture is that the traditional 'preparation' of food is replaced more and more often by 'assembling' meals. Taking this trend to extremes – and considering current food shortages and over population – it is reasonably realistic to foresee disaster scenes. The films represent an existence where 'food' becomes more and more functional, bereft of its rituals, stripped of real enjoyment. Whether the director or scenario writer is expressing his own fear for this sort of scenario, or whether the films are expressing a more general societal fear, it is impossible to say for certain. Along with a possible message, the films have another



function: to entertain, to relax. Thought experiments are thus carried on a vehicle of entertainment.

Scarcity is an important theme, lack of food. This scarcity seems to contribute to the barbaric nature that man adopts, both in general and individually, such as the butcher-landlord Clapet who runs his handy men through the meat mincer (*Delicatessen*).

Life is sustained through government-run restaurants (*Demolition Man*) or through a sort of pill, whereby the chief ingredient for that product – *Soylent Green* – comes from dead bodies from a euthanasia-clinic. However gruesome this image may be, there is a positive side to it. Man is no longer dependent on the food chain that starts with micro-organisms such as plankton through to fruit, vegetables, fish and meat. No, man is the start of the food chain – as a corpse – and the end of the food chain – still alive. The food crisis is ended, be it gruesomely.

It is logical that man must leave the earth. The planet is no longer inhabitable. That makes the distance between man and his food grow. The vegetable plots are rare, only maintained by hobbyists (Neelix in *Star Trek*, Lowell in *Silent Running*). For what do two little vegetable plots count in all those galaxies?

It is not a matter of choice to break with old dietary patterns, for there is no choice left. Food in the future is mostly readymade (the replicator in *Star Trek*) or in the super condensed form of a tablet (*Soylent Green*). The emotional link with – or rather, the memory of – former earthly pleasures remains, and is cherished even. Take the crew in *Alien*. Unperturbed, they enjoy their communal meals with old fashioned, apparently indestructible mugs of coffee with cereals for breakfast. Think how fond Captain Picard is of his tea and cigars. It may comfort us to think that on board of a spaceship we may smoke. Is nothing to be done about that disgusting habit? Apparently yes, for in *Demolition Man*, government has forbidden alcohol and meat. Man is not happy in this society, certainly not the underclass eating rat burgers under the ground. Still the bad lifestyle habits are not merely human, for extraterrestrials discover the joys of drink (E.T. drinking beer and a robot in *Futurama* who is addicted to drink and fat cigars).

In *The Matrix* we saw how important – the memory of – food is. Cypher betrays his mates purely to enjoy the taste of a traditional steak. This Judas is no vegetarian.

There is a glimmer of hope. For at the end of the galaxy, there is the most exceptional restaurant in world history waiting for customers, the restaurant at the end of the universe (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*). There is real meat for sale, meat that can talk. For genetic manipulation has enabled pigs to talk heartily and to wish for nothing more than to be eaten. That neatly does away with all sorts of moral objections to breeding, killing and eating animals. The pigs are not unhappy, on the contrary.

Perhaps we should take care with these science-fiction films and series. For where earthlings see them almost exclusively as entertainment, extraterrestrial civilisations might see them as historical chronicles, as a sort of historical report (*Galaxy Quest*).

What next? As the future for the earth is black, with extinction of our biotope imminent, it is important to cherish our everyday food, and the rituals that accompany it. Science fiction films exhort us to enjoy while we can and give a powerful signal that hedonism is OK! Now! Why not make a stock of your favourite vegetable seeds, food and or drinks for the gloomy times ahead? We admit the chance is small, but we cannot withhold this final piece of advice: make sure you have rye bread, ham and cheese in your store cupboard, plus a little mayonnaise. One wants to be prepared for the arrival of an extraterrestrial, particularly if it comes in the shape of Kim Basinger.

## Films

*Alien* (1979), Ridley Scott (director)  
*Delicatessen* (1991), Marco Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet (directors)  
*Demolition Man* (1993), Marco Brambilla (director)  
*E.T.* (1982), Steven Spielberg (director)  
*Galaxy Quest* (1999), Dean Parisot (director)  
*Futurama* (2007), Dwayne Carey-Hill (director)  
*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005), Garth Jennings (director)  
*The Matrix* (1999), Wachowski brothers (directors)  
*Silent Running* (1972), Douglas Trumbull (director)  
*Soylent Green* (1973), Richard Fleischer (director)  
*My Stepmother is an Alien* (1988), Richard Benjamin (director)  
*Star Trek* (television series and movies), various directors  
*Wall-E* (1988), Andrew Stanton (director)

## References

- Barad, J., & Robertson, E. (2001). *The Ethics of Star Trek*. New York: Perennial.
- Cunningham, A. (2001). *The Heart of What Matters: The Role for Literature in Moral Philosophy*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.
- Davis R. Wookiee (1998). *Cookies: A Star Wars Cookbook*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- D'Hoine, P., & Engelen, B. (2009). *Van film naar filosofie*. Kapellen/Kampen: Pelckmans/Klement [in Dutch].
- Frankeny, F., & Martin, W. (2000). *The Star Wars Cookbook II: Darth Malt and More Galactic Recipes*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Fukuyama, F. (2002). *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.



- Philips, E., & Birnes, W. J. (1999). *The Star Trek Cookbook*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Rowlands, M. (2003). *The Philosopher and the End of the Universe – Philosophy explained through science fiction films*. London: Random House.

## About the Authors

**Dr. E. Philips** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Health, Behaviour and Society at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and a senior research fellow at the Centre for Communications Programs. She has a PhD in Public Health from the University of London and has published numerous papers on the role of food and nutrition in health and disease. She is currently working on a book about the role of food and nutrition in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

**Dr. W. J. Birnes** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Health, Behaviour and Society at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and a senior research fellow at the Centre for Communications Programs. He has a PhD in Public Health from the University of London and has published numerous papers on the role of food and nutrition in health and disease. He is currently working on a book about the role of food and nutrition in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

**Dr. M. Rowlands** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Health, Behaviour and Society at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and a senior research fellow at the Centre for Communications Programs. She has a PhD in Public Health from the University of London and has published numerous papers on the role of food and nutrition in health and disease. She is currently working on a book about the role of food and nutrition in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

**Dr. E. Philips** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Health, Behaviour and Society at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and a senior research fellow at the Centre for Communications Programs. She has a PhD in Public Health from the University of London and has published numerous papers on the role of food and nutrition in health and disease. She is currently working on a book about the role of food and nutrition in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

**Dr. W. J. Birnes** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Health, Behaviour and Society at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and a senior research fellow at the Centre for Communications Programs. He has a PhD in Public Health from the University of London and has published numerous papers on the role of food and nutrition in health and disease. He is currently working on a book about the role of food and nutrition in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

**Dr. M. Rowlands** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Health, Behaviour and Society at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and a senior research fellow at the Centre for Communications Programs. She has a PhD in Public Health from the University of London and has published numerous papers on the role of food and nutrition in health and disease. She is currently working on a book about the role of food and nutrition in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.