

It's true! Food was far better for us in Forties

By **Graham Hiscott**
Consumer Editor

TODAY'S food has less natural goodness than it had in the 1940s.

The amount of essential minerals in meat and dairy products has dropped by up to 87 per cent over the past 60 years.

It is estimated that a person would need to eat five oranges today compared with one in 1940 to get the same amount of iron and copper.

The latest research follows a study from 2004 which found a similarly worrying fall in fruit and vegetables. The findings point to significant changes in farming practices which have stripped nutrients out of much of the fresh food both humans and animals consume.

Crops grown on "exhausted" land is a major cause of the sharp decline in the nutritional quality of food, say campaigners. They also blame artificial fertilisers used to speed the growth and productivity of crops and the long distances products have to travel before they reach the shelves.

The research by nutritionist David Thomas - which has been

'You'll have to eat five oranges to get the goodness of one back then'

challenged by the food and farming industry - looked at various minerals in meat and dairy products from 1940 and again in 2002. The amount of iron in a rump steak has dropped by 55 per cent over the intervening 62 years. Iron's important uses include carrying oxygen around the body and healthy hair.

The disappearance of iron is even worse in other foods. The figure for turkey is 79 per cent, 78 per cent for streaky bacon and 57 per cent for Stilton cheese.

There has also been a significant reduction in levels of calcium - essential for healthy bones and strong teeth.

Streaky bacon contains 87 per cent less calcium than in 1940. Parmesan cheese has 70 per cent less, turkey 71 per cent and corned beef 45 per cent.

Milk appears to have only lost about 2 per cent of its calcium content over the same period. However, levels of iron in milk have dropped 62 per cent and magnesium by 21 per cent. Most cheeses have recorded a big fall in magnesium - a mineral important for a healthy heart and liver, along with good nerve and muscle function.

According to the analysis, Cheddar provides 38 per cent less magnesium today. Stilton 45 per cent and parmesan 70 per cent.

Dr Thomas, a chiropractor and mineral supplement supplier from Forest Row, East Sussex, noted a big drop in mineral content of fruit and vegetables in an earlier study based on the same data. The latest findings are published in this

month's Food Magazine, produced by the Foods Commission campaign group.

"We are not only feeding the population a diet of processed and manufactured foods but those foods that are so-called natural haven't got anything like the same natural goodness they did in the past," said Dr Thomas.

The Food Standards Agency, which publishes The Composition of Food report from which Dr Thomas worked, said: "Any differences over time could be due to a wide variety of factors."

The Dairy Council and Meat and Livestock Commission claimed the changes were less to do with farming practices and more to better testing. *if these figures were true* "we'd expect to see a lot of anaemic cows wondering around," said spokesman Mike Attenborough.

It is argued that today's agricultural methods do not allow the soil to enrich itself, instead relying on chemical fertilisers that do not replace the wide variety of nutrients in plants that we need.

The FSA said using the Government tables to make comparisons could present problems.

"It could be due to a wide variety of factors, including variety and breed, animal husbandry, growth, storage conditions, preparations and cooking methods as well as differences in analytical methodology," it added.